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Nature and grace in the work of Hans Urs Von Balthasar with particular reference to the theo-drama

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**Nature and grace in the work of
Hans Urs von Balthasar with
particular reference to the *Theo-
drama***

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PhD

2005.



Abstract

My thesis analyses and assesses von Balthasar's understanding of the nature-grace relationship, initially in his contribution to the mid-twentieth century debate in Catholic theology and then focusing on the development of this position in the *Theo-drama*.

Having set out his rejection of extrinsicism, his adoption of the 'one supernatural end' theory and his use of *analogia entis* to elucidate the consequent *de facto* (but not necessary) unity between creaturely essence and the gift of grace, I explore his christocentric re-formulation of the relationship, going on to give detailed attention to his dramatic and intra-trinitarian framing of the question. I focus on his analysis of our nature understood as finite freedom and the fulfilment of its relationship with infinite freedom through the christological mediation of the human and divine free will in Christ (into which we are initiated by the Spirit), leading to the grace of participation in the divine processions. Taking account of his use of inter-subjective models, the category of gift and his treatment of the image-likeness, idea-prototype relationships, I find this perspective yields an understanding of the nature-grace relationship in which there is a tension between continuity and distinction. In the concrete treatment of his theological anthropology we find the question of nature overtaken by that of personhood and the natural-supernatural relationship articulated in terms of the transition from conscious subject to person in Christ, which simultaneously emphasises grace as unique identity and universalising mission.

Concluding that despite tendencies to the contrary Balthasar ultimately opts for a decidedly dualistic conception of the nature-grace relationship, I close by raising some questions about the way he relates our topic to the doctrine of the Trinity: namely what significance is left to human freedom within a detailed conception of 'our play' within the 'eternal play' of the Trinity, and what it means to introduce *diastasis* to the doctrine of God in an effort to elucidate the God-creature *diastasis*.

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Abbreviations

<i>DB</i>	<i>“Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie”</i>
<i>ET</i>	<i>Explorations in Theology</i>
<i>KB</i>	<i>The Theology of Karl Barth</i>
<i>KDB</i>	<i>Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie</i>
<i>GL</i>	<i>The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Love Alone the Way of Revelation</i>
<i>SRC</i>	<i>Science, Religion and Christianity</i>
<i>Th</i>	<i>Theo-drama</i>
<i>TD</i>	<i>Theodramatik</i>
<i>H</i>	<i>A Theology of History</i>
<i>HDL</i>	<i>The Theology of Henri de Lubac</i>

INTRODUCTION

In the mid-twentieth century a debate shook Catholic theology. It centred on the relationship between nature and grace, between the natural and the supernatural¹ and provoked papal intervention in the encyclical *Humani Generis*, precipitating the withdrawal of the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac's authority to teach, and leaving Hans Urs von Balthasar feeling deeply shocked and overwhelmed.² Decades later the debate seems rather alien: highly technical and abstract. Indeed, even by the time of the Second Vatican Council a considerable shift in perspective had already taken place. Catholic theology was moving away from the exclusive use of the language of neo-scholasticism, from discussion of nature and grace as abstract concepts. A concrete, systematically Christ-centred perspective was emerging in which it is *in Christo* that the truths about human nature and its fulfilment find "their source and most perfect embodiment", and indeed, "it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear."³

At the time of the original debate, well before the Council, Balthasar was already developing such a christocentric approach to the nature-grace question, taking up his

¹ Although there is some evidence of the concept of the supernatural in nuanced form from the beginnings of Christian theology, the description of grace as supernatural only becomes typical in scholastic theology from the thirteenth century onwards. Arising from the need to distinguish grace from God's other gifts (ie between what is already given in nature (*datum*) and the additional gift of grace subsequent to this (*donum*)), the idea of there being an order of being *higher* than nature meant that some gifts could be attributed to the natural order (such as reason and morally good acts) and some to the supernatural (such as faith and meritorious human acts in which grace elevates human action to the supernatural plane). (cf Alister McGrath: *Iustitia Dei A history of the Christian doctrine of Justification I* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1986) 100-102; Henri de Lubac: *Surnaturel etudes historiques* (Paris, Aubier 1946) Part III especially 327, 372, 398 cited by Balthasar: *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (HDL) (Ignatius, San Francisco 1991) 65.

The supernatural character of grace is generally accepted to refer to the fact that grace is not part of and transcends the powers of any created nature. (cf "Grace" in Karl Rahner, ed.: *Encyclopedia of Theology A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (Burns and Oates, London 1975) (CSM) 590 cf also 589; R Haight *The Experience and Language of Grace* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1979) 63; Stephen J Duffy: *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1992) 13). Some definitions specifically include the gratuity of grace (ie freely given and beyond any 'claim' or requirement of human nature) (eg Duffy: *Graced Horizon* 13; cf also Haight: *Experience* 63 and Rahner CSM 589) and the ontological superiority of God's being to human finite being (Duffy: *Graced Horizon* 13).

² "C'est bouleversant, totalement incompréhensible." Letter to H de Lubac July 1950 in Elio Guerriero: *Hans Urs von Balthasar eine Monographie* (Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1993)

³ "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965) paragraph 22 in Austin Flannery, ed.: *Vatican Council II The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* Volume I (Dominican Publications, Dublin 1992)

mentor Erich Przywara's Catholic-Protestant dialogue with Karl Barth's christocentrism and working alongside Catholic colleagues like Romano Guardini and Michael Schmaus⁴ who were also interested in an emphatically Christ-centred approach to all the questions of philosophy and theology. We shall consider this approach in chapters one and two of this thesis. Increasingly Balthasar's grounding of his christocentrism in a doctrine of the *Trinity* becomes more systematic and highly developed. By the time he was writing the *Theo-drama*, the five volume middle section of the great trilogy that constitutes the culmination of his work, this trinitarian focus is dominant. The main part of our study is concerned with an exploration of nature and grace in this latter work. Here it is particularly clear how for Balthasar a *concrete* treatment of the nature-grace relationship is a *dramatic* one, in which there is a *genuine interplay* between God and man (hence his focus on *freedom* as we shall see), and in which things *happen* (abrupt reversals and changes; 'surprise' events with explosive effects on history; ferocious battles against God and copiously fruitful and far-reaching co-operation with Him).

The original mid-century nature-grace debate may now largely have been left behind. However the questions it raised were important ones because they are to do with the very relationship between God and man, between what we are and what we shall be. Perhaps restricted by the highly sensitive theological climate of the day, in many ways these questions were never really solved. In exploring Balthasar's theology of nature and grace, initially in earlier work but mainly in the *Theo-drama*, we can consider how effective a contribution it makes to the Church's ongoing development of an authentic expression of the nature-grace relation. This investigation goes beyond what may at first appear to be the relatively narrow concerns of one rather complex issue in Roman Catholic theology. It is to do with *the very nature, purpose and fulfilment of human existence*, particularly of human freedom, that characteristic that so dominates post-enlightenment reflection on the nature of human being. And as the thesis unfolds we find it is also to do with our

⁴cf Balthasar: *The Theology of Karl Barth* (KB), tr. Edward T Oakes (Ignatius, San Francisco 1992) 326-334 and chapter 2 section A below.

conception of *God*, for, as we shall see, for Balthasar it is who God is that decides everything else.

In this thesis I will indicate the opportunities for an authentic understanding of the nature-grace relationship opened up by Balthasar's patristic/scholastic retrieval and by his intra-trinitarian christocentric perspective. However I will also uncover a tension between continuity and distinction in his understanding of the relationship that ultimately favours a decidedly dualistic conception. I will also question the way he relates our topic to the doctrine of the Trinity, asking what significance is left to human freedom within a detailed conception of 'our play' within the 'eternal play' of the Trinity, and what it means to introduce *diastasis* to the doctrine of God as the ground of the God-creature *diastasis*.

A Defining terms

We are aware in what we have already set out that we are presuming an accepted understanding of the main terms. So before we go any further we wish to provide a preliminary description of what we mean by both 'nature' and 'grace'.

1 Nature

The word nature has a variety of meanings in modern usage and a rich history, having been employed variously down the centuries.⁵ More specifically, in both philosophy and theology it has been used in precise technical senses, such that the terms nature and natural "in certain phrases and combinations, bear whole traditions of meaning and interpretation within themselves."⁶ It is one such influential theological 'combination' that focuses our attention in this thesis: that of 'nature and grace' and, in close relation, 'natural and supernatural'.

⁵ cf RG Collingwood: *The Idea of Nature* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1965); Paulos Mar Gregorios: *The Human Presence An Orthodox View of Nature* (Christian Literature Society, Madras 1980); Gordon Kaufmann: "A problem for Theology: The Concept of Nature" *Harvard Theological Review* 65 (1972) 337-366; S O'Flynn Brennan: 'Nature in philosophy' (Brennan NCE) and M J Dorenkemper: 'Nature in Theology' (Dorenkemper NCE) in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* entry 'Nature' 276-280; 'Nature, Philosophical Ideas of' (NEP) in *New Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* 454-457; Jörg Splett: 'The Philosophical Concept' (Splett SM) and Juan Alfaro: 'The Theological Concept' and 'Nature and Grace' (Alfaro SM) in Rahner, ed.: *Sacramentum Mundi* entry 'Nature' 171-181.

⁶ Kaufmann: "Problem" 339

This uniquely theological usage is not unrelated to other non-theologically specific meanings. One of the oldest and most enduring of these refers to what might be called ‘essence’: something’s native characteristics, constituting it as that particular kind of thing; the inherent behaviour and qualities that make it what it is (‘whatness’).⁷ Strictly this meaning refers to the *intrinsic/internal source* of such essential behaviour, “the constant rise of the individual being in its reality (the essence as actively realised)”,⁸ the principle of motion and rest, of becoming.⁹ In fact Paulos Mar Gregorios, the Syrian Orthodox theologian, makes the interesting observation that this meaning underlies all the other meanings of the term. This is certainly true of the Christian usage on which our attention is focused, for as we shall see, it is the tension between *essential* characteristics or determinations and those that come as a gift from *outside* that lies at the heart of the nature-grace relation and distinction. It is therefore in the sense of these two meanings—the Christian ‘nature and grace’, and the philosophical ‘essence’—that we use the word nature in this thesis.

However we should mention one other meaning. Whilst the use of nature as essence is still common today,¹⁰ modern usage is dominated by the use of the term to refer to ‘the totality of all that is’.¹¹ Although this is not the main application of the word in this thesis, theology is not isolated from this shift in meaning and it does indeed have relevance for our topic. Whilst the use of ‘nature’ in this sense has little

⁷ It is something’s “inherent qualities or characteristics”, “its essential qualities or properties”, “what was native to it”, “that which constitutes it or him as that particular (kind of) object or person, appearing and behaving as it (he) does, having just those qualities and characteristics” Ibid. 339; “the given structure or constitution of a person or thing” referring to both “the given behaviour pattern and the expected character of an entity” Gregorios: *Human* 18; “the laws and principles of structure by which the behaviour of things may be explained” NEP 454; “that which determines a being’s species and proper activity” MJD NCE 279; “human existence under the laws of our particular kind of being; the individual as conditioned, limited, finite, determined” Haight: *Experience* 44 (referring to Karl Rahner’s understanding of nature); that by which things “severally and collectively are what they are” Collingwood: *Idea* 52.

⁸ Splett SM 171 going forth, *nasci*.

⁹ Brennan NCE 276; Collingwood refers to nature as the internal source of a things behaviour (*Idea* 45) making it behave as it does (46), and sets out the Aristotelian definition of nature as “the essence of things which have a source of movement in themselves.” (81) This is how *physis* was generally used.

¹⁰ cf Ibid. 43ff; Gregorios: *Human* 18

¹¹ cf Kaufmann: “Problem” 339-340; Gregorios: *Human* 17-18; Collingwood: *Idea* 43; NEP 454; Dorenkemper NCE 279

or no basis in Scripture or patristic writing,¹² it is being applied to a reality of great importance to the Christian tradition: creation. More significantly for us, right from the earliest days of Christianity, this ‘all things’ that nature now often designates comes up in phrases corresponding to aspects of what has since been expressed as a nature-grace relationship: for example the Pauline doctrine of the recapitulation of all things in Christ, or the relation of the first and the second creation. We will therefore sometimes find nature employed in this sense of totality, particularly because Balthasar tends to move from nature-grace to creation-grace terminology. The use of nature as totality in this context we shall see also relies upon the meaning of nature as essence. For it is what it is in its essence that distinguishes and/or relates nature as totality to whatever it is/receives by grace.

Finally we are considering the nature-grace relationship in the context of the human vocation, our existence and fulfilment, so our focus as regards the ‘essence’ meaning of nature will be on *human* nature in particular.

2 Grace

The word grace is also rich in meaning and does not succumb instantly to tidy definition. Partly because of its varied usage through history, but also because of its very *centrality* to the Christian faith, it is used with reference to different aspects of the Christian life.¹³ It is ***God’s action*** in us forgiving, healing, justifying, liberating, sanctifying, and necessary for every salutary act¹⁴ (as for example in Augustine’s conception, highly influential in the West, particularly in Protestant theology). It is thus understood as God’s *love* for us, often particularly associated with the Holy Spirit. It is ***God himself*** relating to and giving himself to us (a perspective characteristic of the Eastern tradition¹⁵ and dominant in contemporary Catholic definitions, which concentrate less on different *categories* of grace¹⁶). It is the

¹² cf eg Gregorios: *Human* especially 17-27

¹³ cf Haight: *Experience* 46; Martin Henry: “Reflections on Grace (1)” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 66 2001 197

¹⁴ It is from this that the concept of actual grace, helping every action, derives.

¹⁵ The Eastern tradition has no conception of created grace, that is as a gift really distinct from God.

¹⁶ cf Karl Rahner: “Nature and Grace” in *Theological Investigations* IV 177ff; CSM 588-595; Duffy: *Horizon* 13, 106; R Haight: *Experience* 46. The basic categories that became typical in Catholic theology are *sanctifying/habitual grace* (a constant supernatural state of being intrinsically

relationship human beings have with God when his self-communication is received by them (as for example in the understanding of grace as *participation* in the divine life or as the *indwelling* of the Godhead), and it is on the basis that this ‘life in God’ transcends our natural capacities that grace is understood as *elevating* and *supernatural*¹⁷. In all cases it is a gift unmerited and gratuitous, freely given by God out of his infinite goodness and love.¹⁸

Without embarking upon a detailed study of the history of the word (which would go well beyond what is possible here), we can sum up what we mean by grace in this thesis by saying that it is the gift of *communio*, communion of the human person with God and with other persons who are also in communion with Him. It is a communion in and through Christ and the Holy Spirit and (especially for Balthasar) a communion modelled on and grounded in the eternal communion of the persons of the Trinity. To elaborate further on Balthasar’s position here would of course anticipate the contents of this study, but we can say that this basic description embraces a variety of different emphases which incorporate the understanding of grace both as God’s giving himself and as his acting in us and us in Him. We shall find that this exploration of grace is at once a question of theological anthropology, of the relationship of finite and infinite freedom; of christology, of soteriology, and of the doctrine of the Trinity.

We should point out from the outset that we are not exploring grace in terms of religious experience in the context of spirituality and prayer, nor in terms of vocation understood as different states of life, nor have we focused on the specifically ecclesiological and sacramental dimensions of the doctrine of grace or on the

sanctifying and justifying) and *actual grace* (a temporary divine intervention moving the soul to perform a salutary act, including *prevenient grace*, preceding and affecting an act of the will, and *subsequent grace*, accompanying and supporting the act.) For more detail on a host of other divisions and distinctions cf L Ott: *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Mercier Press, Cork 1957) 220ff; William E Addis and Thomas Arnold, eds.: *A Catholic Dictionary* (Virtue, London 1952) 375-379.

¹⁷cf eg Haight: *Experience* 54-75; McGrath: *Iustitia* I 100-102; Rahner: CSM 588-591; cf also note 1 above.

¹⁸This is dominant in the original biblical meanings (grace as divine benevolence, unmerited gift or favour), although gratuity has remained an essential characteristic of grace in the more substantive meanings.

eschatological aspect, although we have suggested the direction in which this would be developed.

B Structure of thesis

Our first chapter discusses Balthasar's approach to the topic in his book *Karl Barth* published in 1951 and in an article published a couple of years later. Chapters two and three put forward Balthasar's christocentric perspective at this earlier stage and as it is developed later in the *Theo-drama*. In chapters four and five we focus on the theo-dramatic perspective exploring Balthasar's treatment of finite freedom and its christo-pneumatological fulfilment in infinite freedom, touching too on his use of the image-likeness relationship, the concept of idea and the theme of being 'born of God'. Following Balthasar's own progression in volume two of the *Theo-drama* we move from the more abstract consideration of finite freedom to the concrete "man", Chapter six offering an outline of the theological anthropology contained in the *Theo-drama* and chapter seven setting out Balthasar's understanding of personhood in Christ. The concluding chapters draw together from the preceding sections the dominant strands of Balthasar's theology of nature and his theology of grace, providing a critique of his treatment of both concepts and the relation between them. Throughout we will find Balthasar often cautious about explicit treatment and categorisation, especially as he moves away from the terminology of the initial debate, for the topic

concerns the most delicate and most mysterious of aspects; our words and concepts are better employed in protecting it against misuse rather than in subjecting it to the microscope of worldly reason.¹⁹

C Theo-drama

The central concerns of the *Theo-drama* are the concerns of a theology of grace:

...God takes the first step, in surpassing love and utterly free grace, by enabling man to act authentically in Christ's acting area and so respond to God's prior action: this constitutes the central theme of theo-drama.²⁰

¹⁹Balthasar: *Theo-drama* II (Th II), tr. Graham Harrison (Ignatius, San Francisco, 1990) 312; cf KB 290-291; *Explorations in Theology* I (ET I), tr. A V Littledale with Alexander Dru (Ignatius, San Francisco 1989) 61, 172

Each of the three parts of Balthasar's great trilogy corresponds to one of the transcendentals. Whilst the theo-aesthetics is concerned with the beautiful and the *Theo-logic* with the true, the *Theo-drama* is concerned with the good. The question of God's manifestation (on the plane of light, image and vision) in the theo-aesthetics is a prelude to the central event (on the plane of deed, event, drama),²¹ that is, the encounter of infinite divine freedom and finite human freedom in creation and history,²² the event in which God acts for man and man responds through decision and deed.²³ This is the concern of the theo-dramatics. God does not simply want to be "contemplated" or "perceived by us, like a solitary actor by the public, but has from the beginning provided a play in which we must all share."²⁴ The *Theo-drama* then is thinking through the *bonum* "as the historically dramatic mutual orientation of the divine-trinitarian freedom and the sinful-redeemed human freedom" to eschatology.²⁵ It is about grace because it is about the self-giving of God, about the Being whose 'epiphany' is considered in the theo-aesthetics, delivering itself and therefore showing itself to be good;²⁶ and it is about the response, the answer made to the splendour that not only reveals, but also surrenders itself. There is *bonum*, there is action and ethics, because there is *the donum*: lying within the triune self-giving of God there is the gift that implies a task, that is, the gift of the free self, its liberation for the sake of authentic response to God, and the mission given it which can make a genuine contribution to 'the play'.

²⁰Balthasar: *Theo-drama* III (Th III), tr. Graham Harrison (Ignatius, San Francisco, 1992) 52

²¹Balthasar: "In Retrospect" in John Riches, ed.: *The Analogy of Beauty. The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1986) 217

²²Balthasar: "Another Ten Years — 1975" in *Ibid.* 224

²³Balthasar: "Retrospect" 217

²⁴Balthasar: "Another Ten Years" 225

²⁵Balthasar: "Theo-logic: On the Work as a Whole" *Communio* Winter 1993 623-637, here 636

²⁶Balthasar: *My Work in Retrospect* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1993) 116

PART I

**DEVELOPING AN INTRA-
TRINITARIAN CHRISTOCENTRIC
PERSPECTIVE**

Chapter 1

Developing a concept of nature and a concept of grace

A The debate

In the neo-scholastic theology that dominated Catholic theology for more than half of the previous century the order of nature and the order of grace were seen as markedly remote from one another and the supernatural distant from human experience. A *purely natural* end for human life was considered (including speculation on the nature of such an end had man not been given a supernatural finality), and nature became more and more like a coherent, self-enclosed system to which the supernatural was attached like a supplementary upperstorey.

The *resourcement* in twentieth century Catholic theology, broadly associated with the school of thought known as the *nouvelle theologie*, marked a shift from a dry, manual-learnt, decadent neo-scholasticism to the original sources of the Fathers. This approach moved away from the harsh extrinsicism in which grace can be viewed as a mere addition to a human nature complete in itself. Speculation about a hypothetical purely natural world order was replaced by focus on the concrete world order as in fact established by God, a world in which communion with God is central to God's intention for humanity and thus more attention was given to the link between nature and grace.¹

¹On this development and the debate with neo-scholasticism cf Stephen J Duffy: *The Graced Horizon Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Liturgical Press, Minnesota 1992) and *The Dynamics of Grace: Perspectives in Theological Anthropology* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1993); R Haight: *The Experience and Language of Grace* (Gill and Macmillan, Dublin 1979) 124f; Martin Henry: "Reflections on Grace" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 66 195-210 here 199, 202, 208-210; Rahner: 'Nature and Grace' in *Theological Investigations* IV 165-188 (Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1966); S Boyle: "The Nature of Man and the Call to the Divine", in *Faith* 26 n 6 Nov/Dec 1994; Medard Kehl: "Hans Urs von Balthasar A Portrait" Introduction to Medard Kehl and Werner Löser, eds.: *The von Balthasar Reader* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1982) 17ff; John Riches: "Balthasar and the Analysis of Faith" in *The Analogy of*

Henri de Lubac's work was groundbreaking in this regard, with theologians like Karl Rahner, H Bouillard and Balthasar himself adopting a similar focus, although the detail of their approaches varied. Pope Pius XII's correction of those theologians who denied the divine possibility of creating "intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision"² in his encyclical *Humani Generis* in 1950 was interpreted as a condemnation of de Lubac's ideas and put these developments into a state of crisis. However his gradual rehabilitation went hand in hand with the general acceptance of the main points of his thesis, although the details of his interpretation are still disputed. Balthasar makes his main contribution to the debate in his book on Karl Barth's theology³ (which he intended as a dialogue between de Lubac and Barth⁴). Aspects of his position on nature can be traced back, however, to articles written in the mid 1940s (owing much to his other great mentor, Erich Przywara),⁵ and he followed up comments and criticisms of the discussion in *Karl Barth* with an article published in 1953.⁶

Beauty 41-44; William V Dych: *Karl Rahner* (Geoffrey Chapman, 1992) 32-37; John Riches: "Hans Urs von Balthasar" and JA DiNoia: "Karl Rahner" in David Ford, ed.: *The Modern Theologians* (Blackwell, Oxford 1989) 193-4, 238, 242; John O'Donnell: *Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Chapman, London 1992) 3; Balthasar: *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (HDL) (Ignatius, San Francisco 1991).

Contemporaneous works include: Henri de Lubac: *Surnaturel, Etudes Historiques* (Aubier, Paris 1946) (or the new edition Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1991), later modified in view of criticisms as *Augustinisme et Théologie Moderne* (Aubier, Paris 1965) (*Augustinianism and Modern Theology* (Herder and Herder, New York 1969), and also *Le Mystère du Surnaturel* (Editions Montaigne, Aubier 1965) (*The Mystery of the Supernatural* (Geoffrey Chapman, London 1967); P Gutwenger: "Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie" in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 75 (1953) 461-464; Rahner: "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace" *Theological Investigations* I (Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1974) 297-317; PJ Donnelly: "Current Theology" *Theological Studies* VIII (1947) 486-488; IX. (1948) 213-249, 554-60 and "Current Theology The Gratuity of the Beatific Vision and the Possibility of a Natural Destiny" in *Theological Studies* 11 1950 pp 374-404; Charles Boyer: "Nature Pure et Surnaturel dans le "Surnaturel" du Pere de Lubac" in *Gregorianum* 28 1947 379-95; cf also notes 3 and 6 below.

²Pius XII: Encyclical Letter *Humani Generis* (1950) 26

³ *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie* (1st edition: 1951 Jakob Hegner, Köln; 2nd edition: 1962) (KBD) In what follows we refer to the second edition. English translation: *The Theology of Karl Barth*, tr. Edward T Oakes (Ignatius, San Francisco 1992) (KB)

⁴ Private letter to de Lubac July 1950 in Elio Guerriero: *Hans Urs von Balthasar eine Monographie* (Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1993).

⁵ KB 270 note 5 ("Analogie und Dailectik. Zur Klärung der theologischen Prinzipienlehre Karl Barths" *Divus Thomas* 22 (1944) 171-216 and "Analogie und Natur. Zur Klärung der theologischen Prinzipienlehre Karl Barths" *Divus Thomas* 23 (1945) 3-56)

⁶ "Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie" in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 75 (1953) (DB), 453-461

B Balthasar's re-formulation of the nature concept

Firstly, with de Lubac, Balthasar maintains that in the concrete world created by God man has *one* end: a *supernatural* one. Nature exists for the sake of grace and is ordered to it, and there is a *de facto* (but not necessary) unity between man's creaturely essence and the free gift of grace from his origins.⁷ The creature is always in some relation to grace, although the grace of creation is not to be equated with "the actual grace of God's supernatural self-disclosure."⁸ According to this perspective nature is *open* and crucially (with de Lubac) "man's spirit is a *paradoxical creation* that straddles the threshold between natural and supernatural and belongs to both orders in the concrete creation we know."⁹ Thus Balthasar argues for a more dialectical understanding of nature,¹⁰ not like the extreme ambiguity of a traditional Protestant understanding,¹¹ but a two-sidedness (*Doppelsinnigkeit; Doppelseitigkeit*).¹² What is specifically supernatural is *above nature* as it is beyond nature's own powers to attain, but is also *in accordance with nature* inasmuch as it has been made for it and has therefore been made capable of it. It expresses the peculiarity of man's situation, who, having no other goal than the supernatural vision of God, has "a nature that cannot be fulfilled through its natural possibilities alone";¹³ he can only fulfil himself beyond himself. Balthasar takes up de Lubac's thesis that this is the perspective of the Fathers and of Thomas.¹⁴

⁷ KB 267-268 Augustine calls this unity nature. 271

⁸ The self bestowal involved in establishing the creature as Other does not approach this opening up and giving of self. This would be Pelagian. Ibid. 379

⁹ Ibid. 296 (my italics), cf also 343-357; Balthasar: *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (HDL) (Ignatius, San Francisco 1991) 66-67

¹⁰ KB 267 cf Balthasar: *My Work In Retrospect* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1993) 63.

¹¹ This can be found in Calvin, for example, where nature includes grace at one moment (original creation; sin therefore unnatural) and excludes it at another (fallen man; sin now the expression of his nature). KB 272

¹² 'doublesideness' or 'ambiguity' (KBD 282/KB 270; KBD 298/KB 287; KBD 300/KB 289).

¹³ KB 268

¹⁴ Ibid. 267-270 There is not space here to enter into debate over this interpretation. cf bibliography in note 1 above. Balthasar supports the one end interpretation of Thomas with reference to de Lubac's argument in *Surnaturel* (especially 431-480) as well as mentioning various scholars (among them Henri Rondet and Michael Schmaus) who accepted his historical analysis (KB 267 note 1; 344 note 62). cf also HDL 64f. As regards the paradoxical nature of man Balthasar cites S Th II/II q 2, a 3, c (KB 282 note 27); S Th III q 9, a 2, ad 3 (KB 268), a sentence which "could be replaced with any number of others." cf also discussion KB 269-270.

Balthasar still supports the development of the nature concept in the Church's formulations after the patristic and high scholastic period.¹⁵ However he rejects the way in which some theologians turned the *hypothesis* of pure nature (initially used to defend the gratuity of grace against the juridical bond between nature and grace of Baius and Jansen,¹⁶) into a *full scale system* with "all the seeming power of reality".¹⁷ This system then came to dominate modern Catholic theology (at the expense of the patristic and scholastic two-sided understanding of nature¹⁸). It entailed the futility of discussing the nature of man whilst *bracketing* his real meaning and purpose.¹⁹ Moreover, it is extremely difficult to isolate the *purely* natural²⁰ from what is touched by the supernatural because of the de facto unity of nature and grace in the concrete. Therefore as attempts were made to give the pure nature abstraction some content, talk soon trespassed upon the concrete order already "enmeshed in the order of grace" and aspects of the concrete concept were subtly subsumed into the abstract one.²¹ It was no longer the tension between pure nature and the concrete state from which it has been isolated that was being described but the old patristic and scholastic tensions between *natura* and *gratia*; the tension between creation and covenant. Thus, ironically, this artificial attempt to make a clear separation of nature and grace (in the wake of Baius' understanding of a necessary unity) *diminishes* appreciation of the full qualitative difference between them, because what is explored under the category of pure nature inevitably includes the influence of and the relation to the supernatural. Hence, when the supernatural is treated per se, it can appear little more than an upperstorey, rounding off and perfecting an almost self-sufficient substructure.

¹⁵ KB 271-272

¹⁶ Ibid. 269, 348

¹⁷ Ibid. 348

¹⁸ Ibid. 267 He saw that retrieval of this understanding was of service to ecumenical dialogue.

¹⁹ Ibid. 348 In Balthasar's view theology should not focus on such hypothetical investigations, moving rather "within the complex order of this world, which is the *only legitimate object* of theological thought." Ibid. 284; cf also 285

²⁰ Ibid. 283-4

²¹ Ibid. 289; cf 283

Balthasar maintains that both this mistake and that of Baius might have been avoided had theologians properly recognised that nature is not a neutral concept shared by philosophy and theology that can simply be used univocally in both disciplines. Balthasar is not proposing an extreme Protestant dialectic, but an *analogy* between philosophical and theological usage.

A philosophical concept of nature originating with Aristotle and developed by the Stoics and the Scholastics is at once static (as regards essence), and dynamic (in the sense of teleological). It is understood from its meaning and effects, that is its finality, and it cannot be understood apart from this dynamic meaning. The ways and means of achieving its finality are possessed by and inherent to its full logical constitution.²² It would follow logically from this that the dynamic unity of the being of man also possesses inherently what is required to achieve the supernatural goal to which he is ordained.²³ This univocal application of the philosophical concept was Baius's position; the Fathers before him had considered the possibility of such an application. A purely philosophical perspective could not identify a problem with such a position. It is only from revelation that we know that man's finality is only achieved by the free gift of grace and so it is theology alone, based on faith, that can provide the more precise delimitation of nature that rules out the Baian 'mis-development', on the basis of a new theological insight: that our vocation to the beatific vision "can in no way be derived from the *essence* of the *creature*."²⁴

In Balthasar's view the mistake of the pure nature theologians and their false extrinsicism originates in the fact that they also univocally adopted this philosophical concept of nature. So in their zealous determination to avoid thus bringing grace within the remit of nature (as Baius concluded), they had to give man an end that *was* proportionate to his nature, the purely natural end.

²² Ibid. 274; HDL 66

²³ KB 274

²⁴ Ibid. 275

Without rejecting what is useful and true about philosophical insights, theology cannot indiscriminately apply a concept of nature that does not cohere with the uniquely Christian understanding of the human being: his end is not simply proportionate to his nature, nor therefore is his ‘natural desire’ restricted to what his natural capacities can attain of themselves, for God has made him for himself “and our hearts are restless till they rest in thee”!²⁵

So Balthasar’s emphasis on the *de facto* unity between nature and grace does not mean a *merging* of one order with the other. Indeed he is uneasy that the pure nature system’s tendency to ‘steal’ from the concrete nature concept (already touched by grace) leaves the supernatural without its unique dimensionality. This shows his concern for the full *qualitative distinction* between the two. For the fact that the borderline between the two orders is difficult to identify in the concrete by no means implies that the distinction between the two is diminished.

God’s real world order is the *de facto* unity of two *materially* distinguishable and distinct orders that can be differentiated in analysis but are still not separate in reality.²⁶

It is precisely this true distinction that Balthasar intends to put forth by recognising the limitations of the philosophical definition and approaching the question primarily theologically, that is from the perspective of revelation.

C Defining nature and grace

This approach means that grace is not best deduced from below as that which is not nature.²⁷ Rather grace is

revealed in its own inner essence so that its reality, mysteriously transcending all of nature, can be realised in its very essence.

The positive definition of grace can only be given through grace itself. God must himself reveal what he is within himself.

Balthasar defines grace as

that self-disclosure and self-communication of God in which God no longer possesses his own divine inner life for himself but now bestows it upon the world and thereby gives the creature a share in it.²⁸

²⁵ Augustine: *Confessions*

²⁶ KB 280

²⁷ Ibid. 275ff

²⁸ Ibid. 364

It is a participation in God's inner divine life²⁹ that is consciously and ontically real; has an event aspect and an ontological aspect, being "a genuine ontological transformation, a genuine imparting of divine Being and a genuine sharing of the creature in God's Being that affects the creature's own being as well as the creature's awareness of the world of divine Being."³⁰ This partaking in "what is most unique to God"³¹ can be begun now,³² and involves no loss of identity³³ or eradication of the God-creature distance.³⁴ It is "a new relationship to Christ and through him to the triune God"³⁵ involving an ontic incorporation into Christ as members of his body.³⁶ Indeed, grace, put more concretely, is "Jesus Christ, our Advocate before the Father".³⁷ God's decision to enter into a history with the creature he has endowed with being means encounter and mutual exchange - which cannot exclude ontological elements: "real participation and lasting ontic effect (*qualitas inhaerens*)".³⁸ There is room for differing degrees of closeness and distance, "for all real events and phases that make up man's way to God: conversion, progress, backsliding, co-operation and obstacles."³⁹ (The dominant 'event quality' of this description of grace as (christological) participation is already moving in the direction of the dramatic presentation of the later *Theo-drama*.)

Defining grace from its own reality affects how we understand the counterconcept too, meaning that the creature cannot delimit itself in relation to grace, seeing as this is known by the revelation of God alone. Only the light of revelation can clarify the difference between creature and God.⁴⁰ So it is primarily working from grace that the theological nature concept is defined as "that aggregate of things that is set off from

²⁹ Ibid. 279, 285, 286

³⁰ Ibid. 365

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. 366, 370

³³ Ibid. 365

³⁴ Ibid. 286, 287

³⁵ Ibid. 343

³⁶ Ibid. 365

³⁷ Ibid. 373

³⁸ Ibid. 366

³⁹ Ibid. 377

⁴⁰ Ibid. 279; DB 457-458

grace and the supernatural order”,⁴¹ “‘abstracted’ or pulled away from a totality *that we are given from the start*”⁴² by an a posteriori subtraction. (It is in this sense that it can be called a ‘residual’ or ‘remainder’ concept⁴³).

Whilst on the one hand God’s self-giving in grace cannot be derived from the gift of creation (Baius),⁴⁴ the fact that we define nature primarily by working from grace does not mean that we *deduce* nature from grace either, as Balthasar concludes Barth does.⁴⁵ Nature is rather ‘the antechamber’,⁴⁶ the logical (if not necessarily chronological) presupposition of grace,⁴⁷ the “minimum that must be present in every possible situation where God wants to reveal himself to a creature.”⁴⁸ Grace is for it and in it, being modal, not substantial.

Nature exists concretely in the transformed exalted “mode” of being graced. But the subject that has been so transformed is none other (*non alter*) than that of nature, even if it has become something different (*aliter*).⁴⁹

It pervades the concrete structure of the world like an abstract formal blueprint does a building.⁵⁰ Thus an abstract and formal understanding of nature fashioned by some kind of subtraction process is not without significance for Balthasar, despite his emphasis on the importance of the concrete.

As presupposed subject the necessity of the nature concept is prior to the facticity of revelation, but this is a necessity dependent on the free decision of God and a priority relative to the facticity of revelation which supports and circumscribes it.⁵¹ Here we identify an abiding pattern in the way Balthasar frames his analysis. The significance of nature as a formal and necessary presupposition is upheld, but this ordering is embraced by the facticity of revelation issuing from God’s one plan for the world which was always made for grace. In this way the philosophical necessity of nature grounded in

⁴¹ Ripalda *De Ente Supernaturali* I, d I, s I and 9, quoted by Balthasar KB 279.

⁴² KB 280, 282-3; DB 453

⁴³ cf KB 299

⁴⁴ Ibid. 275

⁴⁵ Ibid. 281

⁴⁶ Ibid. 285

⁴⁷ eg Ibid. 281, 285

⁴⁸ Ibid. 285

⁴⁹ Ibid. 281

⁵⁰ Ibid. 283

God's decision to create a world is upheld against Barth, whom Balthasar felt had sacrificed serious acknowledgement of this aspect of the doctrine of creation for the sake of his christocentric 'system'.⁵² At the same time this relationship of necessity and contingency is embraced within the fact of God's gracious plan upon which the relative necessity of nature depends and for which it is designed and in which it stands in its concrete state. In distinction from the tendency in Catholic theology that Balthasar rejects with de Lubac, this relationship in the reality of the concrete state is the focal point for Balthasar; but in distinction from Barth this does not make the relative necessity of the prior God-creator relationship unimportant.

D The analogy of being and the nature concept

Balthasar's treatment of a formal concept of nature makes distinctive use of the analogy of being.⁵³

Balthasar's use of the analogy of being is central to his thought. For him analogy is far more than a tool of theological expression. Rather, following his decisive encounter with Erich Przywara⁵⁴ during his philosophical training in Pullach near Munich, he takes up the Polish thinker's use of the definition of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215)—“For all the similarity between God and the creature, there exists an ever-greater dissimilarity”—as an “all-embracing law of being”⁵⁵ governing every aspect of the God-creature relationship.⁵⁶ ‘Similarity within ever-greater dissimilarity’ is thus the inviolable rhythm running throughout the relationship between God and man. It is therefore a central principle for all philosophical and theological thought and is clearly particularly crucial to our topic. Its importance to von Balthasar is also related to the centrality of the ‘real distinction’ in his thought, namely, that created being is always in

⁵¹ Ibid. 285

⁵² cf chapter 2 section A below

⁵³ KB 285ff

⁵⁴ “the greatest spirit whom I have been permitted to meet” *In Retro* 10

⁵⁵ Th III 220

⁵⁶ It is not my intention here to assess Przywara's distinctive use of analogy. (An interesting discussion can be found in Henry Chavanne: *The Analogy between God and the World in St Thomas Aquinas and*

a state of tension between essence and existence (thus always in ‘becoming’), in contrast to the perfect identity of essence and existence in God from which the former originates and to which it is oriented.⁵⁷ Whilst each essence, each existence thus bears some kind of relationship to God, the dissimilarity of the ‘real distinction’ is always greater than any similarity (*in tanta similitudine major dissimilitudino*). Balthasar attributes the main insight here to Thomas’s understanding of *esse* (as “the non-subsistent fullness and perfection of all reality and as the supreme ‘likeness of divine goodness’”) which distinguishes God from ‘the being of things’, giving a new more radical emphasis to his transcendence.⁵⁸

So the nature-grace relationship must be understood according to the analogy of being, not because it must submit to some alien philosophical law dreamt up in the middle ages, but because the analogy of being is precisely to do with the doctrine of the creation, that when God creates there is at once a complete contrast between the contingent creatureliness of what he brings into existence and his own uncreated being *and* also some kind of relationship of likeness between the being of the creatures he created and his own divine uncreated being. Balthasar therefore agrees with Barth’s emphasis on the utter dissimilarity between *Gottsein* and *Geschöpfsein* but draws attention to the relationship at the level of being contained within this very contrast: for we are talking about *Gottsein* and *Geschöpfsein*.⁵⁹ (Later we will see how Balthasar finds this relationship illuminated by a specifically trinitarian christocentric perspective.⁶⁰) When God says “Let us make man in our image”,⁶¹ image implies an ontological relationship of likeness, a likeness at the level of being, and hence an analogy

Karl Barth (Vantage Press, New York 1992) who finds Przywara’s conception problematic and certainly very different from Thomas’.)

⁵⁷ *Explorations in Theology I The Word Made Flesh* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1989) (ET I) 163f, 173f; “Theo-logic: On the Work as a whole” *Communio* Winter 1993 625

⁵⁸ cf Balthasar: *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (GL) IV (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1989) 393ff

⁵⁹ KB 286

⁶⁰ cf chapter 2 section C below

⁶¹ Genesis 1. 26

of being,⁶² which, precisely because it is a likeness between what is completely different (that is between created and uncreated) is described always as a likeness within unlikeness (as in the Lateran formula). Both features of the God-man relationship must be upheld: that we are fundamentally and inviolably *not* like God, and that we *are* like him in our constitution as *imago dei*—not because of any claim we may have, but because God made us that way.

Central to this application of the Lateran definition is the fact that it is continually applied to *all* treatment of the God-man relationship. For Przywara's 'likeness within unlikeness' embraces the *dynamic* aspect of the relationship too. The measure of distance never decreases as closeness grows. On the contrary: it is ever greater. It is a case of 'dynamic similarity within ever-increasing dissimilarity'. We will find this rhythm beats throughout Balthasar's treatment of grace: the closer we get to God the more we realise how much greater and different God is.⁶³

Now in *Karl Barth* Balthasar proposes that the formal concept of nature (understood as the 'minimum' presupposition of all grace) is createdness (*Geschöpfsein*)⁶⁴ as such and is to be expressed by the *analogia entis* precisely because this conveys the fact that nature is both like and unlike God its Creator. At the level of the formal concept the emphasis is on the aspect of dissimilarity in the analogy of being, without amounting to an *identification* of nature and the aspect of dissimilarity. (This would lead back to Baius's position, making grace (as the aspect of similarity) *necessary* for the creature, for dissimilarity *alone* would be impossible). Likewise grace emphasises the aspect of similarity (for it gives a participation in the divine nature) but is not identical with the aspect of similarity (in which case the intimacy of grace might be understood to involve a 'catching up' with God, narrowing the ontological 'gap').⁶⁵ Rather, as the analogy of being applies to *every* aspect of the God-creature relationship both similarity and dissimilarity belong with *both* nature and grace.

⁶² cf Balthasar: *Theo-drama* II, (Th II) tr. Graham Harrison (Ignatius, San Francisco, 1990) 320-321

⁶³ cf eg KB 373, 297

⁶⁴ Ibid. 285; 287 (*Geschöpflichkeit*)

Oddly though, in discussing the content of the formal concept Balthasar appears to be referring to something which under his own terms is all but impossible to talk about, because the nature concept cannot be stripped of its double-sidedness and constrained as a pure concept, refined of all elements affected by its de facto ordering to a supernatural end. Whilst createdness as such is initially associated with the formal concept,⁶⁶ further on it is identified with the “conscious free subject” who hears revelation and must surely therefore be more than a formal concept.⁶⁷ Meanwhile in the article “Der Begriff der Natur” he does identify subject, spirit and in some sense transcendence with the remainder concept⁶⁸, despite expressing concern elsewhere about the possibility of mistaking Rahner’s remainder concept with man’s spirit-nature.⁶⁹ The formal concept of nature remains the “lower limit”, the “bare minimum” of an *open* concept that should not be further circumscribed.⁷⁰ In fact this preoccupation with the formal concept sits rather awkwardly with the line of the main argument where the focus is on nature in the concrete with its necessarily dialectical character straddling both natural and supernatural orders.

It seems that it is in the function, rather than the content, of the formal concept that its significance lies. It has a conceptual task. It *emphasises* the distance between creature and God.⁷¹ As creatureliness, it ensures “that grace is ‘only’ grace and does not turn into nature, meaning a natural participation in God’s nature”;⁷² it *ensures* that the Gospel of grace appears as *religio* (law, command, reverence, and fear of the Lord) as well as *love* (‘which is what it is in God’), such that distance is not eliminated when nature is given grace; and it *tells us* “that everything touched by grace retains its natural side: grace is always in a nature and for a nature”⁷³ in keeping with his understanding of

⁶⁵ Ibid. 286, 287

⁶⁶ Ibid. 285

⁶⁷ Ibid. 291

⁶⁸ DB 453

⁶⁹ KB 299

⁷⁰ Ibid. 291

⁷¹ Ibid. 287 Balthasar’s italics

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

nature as the presupposed ‘subject’ and giving this sense to the old axiom that grace perfects nature, it does not destroy it.

E Nature as remainder concept and use of the supernatural existential

Apart from Balthasar’s distinctive use of the analogy of being, this distinction between the material and formal nature concept, undertaken through a process of abstraction, resembles Rahner’s distinction between the concepts of concrete nature and of pure nature as ‘residual concept’. Balthasar himself makes the connection between his attempt and Rahner’s in *Karl Barth*⁷⁴ and again makes use of Rahner’s suggestions a couple of years later in the article “Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie”⁷⁵ (DB) which responded to criticisms of his approach in *Karl Barth*. He is already aware, however, that there is a tension between Rahner’s scheme and the main presuppositions that de Lubac proposes.⁷⁶ It is as though he is hesitant about which direction to develop de Lubac’s insights. Behind the evolving web of relationship and distinction vis-à-vis de Lubac and Rahner there also lies the question of how much influence to allow the work of Joseph Maréchal (1878-1944). Balthasar acknowledges the insights of the Jesuit philosopher⁷⁷ whose ground breaking ‘transcendental Thomism’ was so important to Rahner, yet he finds himself setting out as a disciple trained in a different school of thought (Przywara, de Lubac). He is aware of a tension between Maréchal’s philosophy and de Lubac’s theology, not least because of yet another flawed application of the relationship between philosophy and theology. This time the goal of human life in God was understood so much as a *philosophical* a priori that it was necessary to retain the weak understanding of natural desire typical of neo-scholasticism

⁷⁴ Ibid. 299

⁷⁵ cf note 6 above

⁷⁶ KB 299

⁷⁷ cf Ibid. 219, 292, 385

(that is, as velleity⁷⁸). This is in contrast to de Lubac's recognition of it as a *theological* a priori, God's one plan for the human creature evident in the intrinsic orientation of nature-grace in nature as we know it.⁷⁹

In the article DB, the possibility of opting for Rahner's account is developed more explicitly. Here the subtraction from the concrete to arrive at the pure, abstract concept is described specifically in terms of deducting the *supernatural existential*⁸⁰ (as the supernatural modification of nature in the concrete), whilst the abstract concept acquired by deducting it is explicitly referred to as the *pure* counterconcept of the supernatural, and as remainder ("*Rest*"⁸¹) (Rahner refers to "*Restbegriff*"⁸²). The use of this terminology uncovers a 'triadic' scheme (nature, supernatural existential, grace): there is a distinction between nature and the existential that raises/modifies it on the one hand⁸³ and between the existential and grace on the other, (the existential being 'before' grace⁸⁴).

⁷⁸ Ibid. 294 This is similar to Balthasar's criticisms of Rahner's 'compromise' over pure nature. Ibid. 299-300 (cf also de Lubac's critique of an 'eternal striving' for God, an "asymptotic approach" to the vision of God HDL 70.)

⁷⁹ KB 292-297 De Lubac's insight "was able to throw a powerful spotlight on the hidden theological a priori in Maréchal's thought: in creation as it actually exists concretely, the "point of identity" on which Maréchal based his thought is not a purely philosophical one at all. It is actually a theological identity-point: namely the one and only goal God has set for human nature, the beatific vision." 296

⁸⁰ DB 453, 460 ("...wie schwierig die exakte Darstellung des Tatbestandes ist, nämlich dessen, was nach Ausklammerung des auf die visio ausrichtenden Existentials im Zentrum der Geisttätigkeit der menschlichen Natur übrigbleibt.") Meanwhile the terminology of the supernatural existential is used throughout the article eg "dem 'Existential' einer übernatürlichen Bestimmung" 453; "der konkreten, existential auf die Gnade ausgerichteten Natur"; "meiner übernatürlichen Ausrichtung (Existential)" 454.

⁸¹ DB 453

⁸² Rahner: "Concerning the Relationship between nature and grace" 313

⁸³ "Die Unterscheidung zwischen Natur und Existential ist aber nicht bloß von einer haarspaltenden Begriffsrabulistik gefordert, sondern entspricht dem einfachen religiösen und christlichen Erfahren, das genau weiß: auch in aller Unausweichlichkeit meiner übernatürlichen Ausrichtung (Existential) entspricht diese Ausrichtung keiner Exigenz meiner Natur." DB 454; cf also 460, as well as the passages already cited where the existential is described as a real modification of nature.

⁸⁴ "da die Ausrichtung auf das übernatürliche Ziel noch vorgängig aller Verleihung heiligmachender Gnade" DB 455; "...die Setzung einer solchen Kreatur durch Gott schon vorgängig aller Gnaden offenbarung eine Bestimmung im innersten Sein des Geschöpfes setzt, welche der realen Ausrichtung auf das übernatürliche Ziel entspricht." 453; cf also reference to Rahner's definition: "Am wichtigsten dürfte in diesem Zusammenhang die von Karl Rahner (in "Orientierung", 30 Juni 1950) getroffene Unterscheidung sein zwischen einer reinen Natur (die nicht auf Übernatur hin geschaffen wäre) und einer auf die Übernatur hin von Gott erdachten und verwirklichten Konkreten Natur, die noch 'vor' aller Begnadung in ihrem Innersten mit dem 'Existential' einer übernatürlichen Bestimmung versehen sein muß." 453 and the substantial quotation from Brisbois on the same page.

P McPartlan interprets de Lubac himself as using a triadic formula proximate to Rahner's. *The Eucharist Makes the Church. Henri de Lubac and John Zizoulas in Dialogue* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1993) 35ff; cf also Balthasar's description of de Lubac's "three moments" in HDL 72 note 36, but also 71 where he is explicit about de Lubac's rejection of Rahner's supernatural existential.

The paradox of the human condition so central to Balthasar's treatment of our topic in *Karl Barth* is thus interpreted as the supernatural existential,⁸⁵ a determination touching nature at its innermost point, but not constitutive of its natural constitution,⁸⁶ "the most inner and real" and "ontologically constitutive of a concrete essence" but still not proper to its nature (Rahner).⁸⁷

This understanding of the dialectic of our nature as the accidental supernatural elevation of our essence is rather distant from the simple understanding dominant in *Karl Barth* that we are creatures made for an end above our natural capacities—although even here there is evidence of the same kind of scheme, for example in a distinction made between nature as presupposition and a summoning elevation *making possible* communion with God.⁸⁸ This kind of approach wants to acknowledge the inmost character of the supernatural modality *without losing pure nature*. This is a tricky compromise, driven by the need somehow to keep two completely different ways of looking at things on board, rather than *a simple expression* of the way things are for us as established by God. The difficulty for Balthasar in pursuing the path most evident in DB is that he may find himself professing a contradiction he has in fact already highlighted in Rahner: that is, understanding the meaning of all creation to rest on God's free decision to give his grace, and understanding "the deepest essence of man from this meaning", yet trying to abstract from this meaning.⁸⁹ If the relationship to the supernatural, the openness to grace is "man's most *intimate and unique* feature...the

⁸⁵ DB 456

⁸⁶ Ibid. 456 ("dieses Existential als eine die Natur im Innersten treffende, obwohl nicht naturhaft-konstitutive Bestimmung...")

⁸⁷ Ibid. "'das Innerste und Eigentlichste' und ein 'ontologisches Konstitutiv seines konkreten Wesens' aber doch nicht zu seiner Natur gehorig."

⁸⁸ "But we must not forget that the grace of the Word gone out to all the world not only presupposes man as subject but radically raises, deepens and fulfils him in the *summons* (*Anruf*) of grace that enables us to become partners with God, exalting us as hearers of the Word." KB 291 Balthasar's italics; cf also 287-288. A passage of Brisbois's quoted by Balthasar in DB as offering the same distinction as Rahner, also speaks in terms of a summons or a call or appeal (*Anruf* and *Berufung*) when describing the new orientation that modifies human nature. DB 453 The use of this kind of language is particularly interesting in the context of Balthasar's later comments about the supernatural existential where the language of summoning is sustained. cf chapter 4 section D below

⁸⁹ KB 299

centre and root of all that he is...How does one go about ‘abstracting the deepest core of things’?”⁹⁰

F Gratuity

The one thing necessary is also the freest gift of all.⁹¹

The pure nature concept was meant to defend the gratuity of grace. As well as having the significant reservations regarding the pure nature hypothesis that we have described, Balthasar does not think that the gratuity of grace is satisfactorily described by distinguishing it as that upon which we have no claim (for we have no claim upon the very existence of our nature either).⁹² *Nature is itself a free gift.*⁹³ Instead Balthasar picks up from de Lubac the importance of understanding the gratuity of grace primarily from above, from its own character, rather than from below, from the fact that nature has no claim on it. De Lubac, Balthasar says, “does not judge the worth of heavenly realities by their sheer distance to us below *but on their own terms.*”⁹⁴ Thus while both creation and grace are considered unowed, creation’s elevation to adoption by God (grace) is a second and higher work “that should not be explained in terms of the first level *but from its own intrinsic character*”, “the personal communication of God’s trinitarian life and essence, which as such will always seem to every creature—however endowed and prepared it might be—to be completely free and undeserved.”⁹⁵

This perspective offers a breathtaking coincidence of certainty or ‘necessity’ (regarding the fulfilment of our nature in the supernatural—because decreed by God), and its utter gratuity,⁹⁶ emphasising the purely analogical relationship between ‘nature necessity’ and ‘grace necessity’, the latter being infinitely more necessary and infinitely more free. Here we find a characteristic feature of Balthasar’s theology: his concern that

⁹⁰ Ibid. (Balthasar’s italics) The issue is again concerned with whether it is possible to synthesise Maréchal’s philosophy and de Lubac’s theology.

⁹¹ Ibid. 357

⁹² Ibid. 277ff

⁹³ cf chapter 4 section B1 and chapter 5 section B below

⁹⁴ KB 297 (my italics); cf 357; DB 457

⁹⁵ KB 296; 285

⁹⁶ Ibid. 296-7; DB 457-8

it be fundamentally informed by spirituality (in the ‘school of the saints’ rather than that of rationalistic philosophy). Through prayer it is possible to sense simultaneously the eternal predestination to grace (as the very purpose of creation) and the utterly unconditional freedom of this election to which there is no claim.⁹⁷ Balthasar uses the analogy of lovers reflecting on their first meeting as both an extraordinary chance occurrence but also written in the stars and predestined by fate.⁹⁸ Indeed intersubjective analogy is an enduring feature of Balthasar’s approach to gratuity. Just as one human being can have no claim to another’s self-disclosure, *in a superabundant sense* creatures have no claim on God’s self-disclosure. *But* we must take full account of the fact that this is only an *analogous* relation between ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural claim’, “because the divine subject stands both much farther, and yet that much nearer to, the creaturely subject than any other human ‘thou’ does.”⁹⁹

Nevertheless Balthasar still hedges a little here too, conceding a place to the pure concept and the consideration of ‘other possibilities’ in expressing the specific gratuity of grace and acknowledging a legitimate tension between this approach from below and the descending approach of de Lubac.¹⁰⁰ However the thrust of his main position seems unquestionable:

From all eternity God has willed one and only one thing: to open up his love to the human race. For that he created the world. Thus from God’s standpoint it is an utterly idle question whether there might have been a world even without this grace. And what has no weight in God’s eyes should carry no weight with us either.¹⁰¹

Balthasar was handling a highly charged topic. He found himself walking a tight rope, the encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), which rejected the approach of those who “distort the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision”,¹⁰² appearing as he finished his Barth book. Balthasar thus acknowledges that any approach that takes such a *non posse* as its starting point is wrong, and concedes that “too many of

⁹⁷ DB 457

⁹⁸ Ibid. 452

⁹⁹ KB 282

¹⁰⁰ DB 454; KB 300-301

¹⁰¹ KB 300-301

the statements of the group of theologians from Lyons have overstepped the mark too far insofar as they have kept the categorical statements about the limits to divine possibility". However he also clearly rejects the opposite tendency which, while preserving gratuity, goes "too far in discussing the possibilities of the Creator".¹⁰³ In as much as Balthasar concedes a place to the consideration of other possibilities (on the basis of God's omnipotence¹⁰⁴), this offers a negative formulation complementing the positive. This is not an exact equivalent expression of "the entire content of the positive for it contains no determination beyond the endowments of pure nature",¹⁰⁵ the negative formulation being unable to express the gratuity of grace as something belonging uniquely to grace and not confused with a general concept of unowedness (because the freedom of grace is not exactly the same as other kinds of freedom in creation). Hence as the relevant phrase in *Humani Generis* was only concerned to defend the unowedness of grace with reference to the order of creation already in place, (correcting an error in this field not setting out a systematic definition of gratuity), just quoting the encyclical does not provide a thematic working out of this distinctive character of grace's gratuity.

G Initial conclusions

As well as the relation to de Lubac and the emphasis on the concrete paradox in Balthasar's work during this period we have also noted a closeness to Rahner as regards the distinction between an abstract and concrete concept of nature identified by a subtraction process from the concrete, and as regards the structure of models used to describe the conceptual relation between a pure nature, its supernatural orientation and its receipt of grace. Despite this hovering tendency towards Rahner's development Balthasar is not unaware that the direction in which Rahner moves somehow undermines de Lubac's fundamental insights, 'disregarding' the supernatural orientation which he recognised as the innermost core of man, in favour of maintaining a hypothetical pure

¹⁰² Pius XII: *Humani Generis* (1950) 26

¹⁰³ KB 344; DB 458-9

¹⁰⁴ DB 458-9

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 458

nature (and thus proposing an unworkable compromise between Maréchal and de Lubac).

Even this modified discussion of pure nature and subtraction risks trapping de Lubac's insights and dragging them into the familiarity of the old system.¹⁰⁶ Whilst thinking remains in the shadow of this system (in which after all these thinkers were trained) it cannot break free completely. When Balthasar asks rhetorically with reference to Rahner whether it is in fact possible and meaningful to ground the meaning of all of creation on God's free decision to bestow grace, understanding man's innermost essence from this, and still to abstract from this very meaning, we doubtless sense the 'no' emerging from his argument. Indeed by the time we get to a later section on nature and grace in the following chapter in *Karl Barth* that considers similar approaches to his own,¹⁰⁷ the confusion and reservation that we experience elsewhere pales into insignificance in the face of unambiguous support for the concrete paradox. Indeed we know that this is the dominant direction intended for the book from what he himself wrote about it.¹⁰⁸ Yet in the book itself, and even more so in DB, we sense that he does not drive this home; he does not have the courage of his convictions to make the point unequivocally and discard the rest decisively. If "there is *in fact* no slice of "pure nature" in this world"¹⁰⁹ then why such fine discussion of its significance? At this level of the debate Balthasar remains stuck. The 'way out' for him was through the pursuit of a completely new approach, that of christology.

¹⁰⁶ Even de Lubac (perhaps as a result of the controversy) tends in subsequent 're-expressions' of his thesis to build up a framework which takes away from the radical nature of his main thesis. cf HDL 72 note 36

¹⁰⁷ KB 343-357 We consider this in the following chapter, section A.

¹⁰⁸ cf *In Retro* 63 and letter to de Lubac July 1950 cited in note 4

¹⁰⁹ KB 288

Chapter 2

The intra-trinitarian christocentric understanding of the relationship between nature and grace

We must now introduce a crucial aspect of Balthasar's thought on this topic: his christocentric focus. In this he develops and goes beyond de Lubac, whose critique of the extrinsic understanding of the nature-grace relationship was so influential on Balthasar. Ultimately de Lubac himself did not consider the nature-supernature terminology "particularly felicitous", acknowledging a shift in favour of speaking of the "mystery of Christ" and of thinking in more personal categories.¹ However it is Balthasar who specifically moves away from the abstract conceptuality and gives the question an emphatically christological setting. It is in his dialogue with Karl Barth in particular that he develops this, but his study of the Fathers is also influential, as are similar attempts at a more christocentric focus on the part of a number of his contemporaries. Meanwhile the thought of his Polish teacher Przywara remains important in his enduring use of the analogy of being, although in this respect too we will find Balthasar forging his own distinctive path (even though we may find Przywara's influence lingers here more than Balthasar realised.)

The fundamental features of this christocentric approach are there in entirety as early as *Karl Barth*, but are to become increasingly dominant and to be expounded in more detail in Balthasar's mature work. In this chapter we will therefore conduct our exploration of various aspects of this christocentrism by starting with their treatment in *Karl Barth* (and often also in essays collected as *Skizzen zur Theologie*

¹*Athéisme et Sens de L'homme* (1968) 96, 107 cited by Balthasar in *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* (HDL) (Ignatius, San Francisco 1991) 68

in 1960²), thus showing how they complete and ‘resolve’ the nature-grace perspective discussed in the previous chapter. We will then show how this is developed in the *Theo-drama*, often doing no more than pointing ahead to detailed treatment in later chapters, but in some cases (notably that of the christological analogy of being) providing a detailed analysis, necessary even at this stage if we are to go on and explore the range of expression in the *Theo-drama* in the remaining chapters. This chapter is therefore both *central* and *transitional* in the thesis: it draws attention to the *central* focus of Balthasar’s understanding of the nature grace relationship and also *bridges* our consideration of his earlier and later work.

A The christocentric perspective on nature and grace

1 Christocentrism

For Balthasar, to learn from the theology of the saints, as we saw him recommending in the previous chapter, is to learn a Christ-centred theology: for them “everything seems insipid and meaningless that does not resonate with the name of Jesus Christ and is not brought before his light.”³ Amongst various aspects of Barth’s thought, it is those insights that provide the foundations for a christocentrism that Balthasar proposes be taken seriously by Catholic theologians.⁴ In fact we shall see that the main argument in *Karl Barth* outlined in the previous chapter itself rests on christocentric principles.

The section of *Karl Barth* entitled ‘Christocentrism’ conveys a whole approach to theology identifiable in a variety of Balthasar’s Catholic contemporaries—notwithstanding other differences between them. Here the unity of theology is not built into it from outside: Christ is the inner unity of theology.⁵ The natural order and all its laws rests on the incarnation and the history that flows from it between God and

² *Verbum Caro (Skizzen zur Theologie I)* (Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln, 1960) English translation: *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh (ET I)* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1989)

³ *The Theology of Karl Barth* (KB) (Ignatius, San Francisco 1992) 297

⁴ *Ibid.* 383

⁵ *Ibid.* 333-334

man.⁶ Creation, history, salvation, judgement are ‘Christ-centred’. As “the very essence of the image of God after whose pattern Adam and creation have been formed”, he is “the ultimate meaning of all that has happened in nature and in history”⁷ and “especially the ‘meaning and measure of human existence’”.⁸ He is the ground and the goal of creation⁹ and we are created through him and for him. In his risen and transfigured state he “is the final goal of all of God’s action and is the image for the ultimate form of man and the world”, in whom we have the promise of adoptive filiation and of being made holy and spotless.¹⁰

Balthasar sets out to adopt this perspective without simply siding with either the ‘Thomists’ or the ‘Scotists’ in the debate about whether or not Christ would therefore have come into the world even if there had been no sin.¹¹ He understands his position to transcend the Thomist-Scotist dichotomy,¹² maintaining that the Incarnation of the Son has been willed from eternity¹³ but that this predestined mission was always seen to include the blood of the Cross.¹⁴

He also rejects what he understood to be the *Engführung*, the constriction, of Barth’s christocentrism. By this he means an exaggerated emphasis, entailing a systematic narrowing of everything to the christological starting point, such that Christ’s priority over creation and sin forces creation “to occupy the Procrustean bed of Barth’s christological schema.”¹⁵ In contrast Balthasar wishes to protect

⁶ Ibid. 383-4

⁷ Ibid. 331 (The first quotation is based on Schmaus: *Katholische Dogmatik* (4th edition, 1949) II 290f the second being an actual quotation from the same volume 855.)

⁸ Schmaus: Ibid. 118 cited KB 332

⁹ KB 331, 353

¹⁰ Schmaus: *Katholische* 185-186 cited KB 332

¹¹ KB 327; *Theo-drama* III (Th III) 253 For the ‘Thomists’ the prime motive of the incarnation was our redemption from sin, such that without the fall the incarnation would not have taken place, whilst for the Scotists it was for the glory of God, as the crown of creation, such that the incarnation would have taken place whether we had fallen or not. Balthasar tends to see the Scotist position in terms of a hypothetical possibility, thus conflicting with his focus on the concrete. In this sense Oakes is not entirely accurate in his attribution of a Scotist leaning to Balthasar (Oakes: *Pattern of Redemption* 220; 226-227).

¹² KB 327-328; Th III 253 note 71; *Mysterium Paschale* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1990) 11-48

¹³ eg *Theo-drama* IV (Th IV) 242-3, 372; Th III 257

¹⁴ Th III 253-254; cf 37; 43 and especially 47-48; Th IV 40; III 516, 517; cf chapter 6 section D2 below

¹⁵ KB 242; cf 127, 128; 129, 136 Th III 257 Barth briefly refers to but does not answer the “mild rebuke” of christological restriction in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1767-768. Instead he retorts that Balthasar’s rejection of such constriction amounts to an illegitimate emphasis on the human response, citing (in polemical tone) Balthasar’s works on Thérèse of Lisieux, Elisabeth of Dijon and Reinhold Schneider that followed the Barth book as setting out “representations of the history of

nature from being deduced from grace and to uphold the authentic priority of nature and reason as the God-given presupposition of the incarnation, of grace, revelation, faith,¹⁶ whilst simultaneously maintaining the Son's choice to descend in the incarnation as the fundamental presupposition of this nature.¹⁷ (Thus, despite Balthasar's deep attraction to Barth's doctrine of predestination, he defends human freedom in the face of Barth's universalist understanding that on the basis of Christ being the chosen one of God, every human being, as a human being, has "been chosen in God's gracious election, determined from the outset to belong to the Body of which Christ is the Head."¹⁸) Barth's 'narrowing', Balthasar thinks, owes much to the adoption of an Augustinian understanding of freedom, that is, measured according to freedom's highest, most authentic form lived by grace in the intimacy of God's freedom in the concordance of independent self-determination and obedient discipleship, *to the exclusion of* "immanent freedom and its prerequisites".¹⁹

2 Christology and the nature-grace relationship

It is Balthasar's christocentric perspective on creation that lies at the heart of the revival of the patristic and scholastic paradox of human nature discussed in the previous chapter. For if we are created in Christ for the new creation, then we are indeed oriented to a supernatural destiny from the start (without this Christ-centred goal thereby being within our natural range of attainment). The location of created nature in relationship with grace right from the very start, is precisely because of its christological ground and goal. The approach from above, from the fact that God has

Jesus Christ" in which the latter "fades into the background", even suggesting a doctrine of "self-sanctification." In his forward to the second edition of *Karl Barth* (this is the Afterword in the English translation KB 391-401) Balthasar places these short works in the context of the rest of his work to date and indicates how material in them corresponds to Barth's own theological preoccupations. He upholds his concerns about Barth's *Engführung* whilst responding to criticism of the term by drawing attention to its origin in musical theory (the fugue) where it refers to the highlighting of one part/voice/instrument. In the *Theo-drama* (Th III 253 note 71) Balthasar refers to Rudolf Haubst's identification of christological constriction in Karl Barth, H Kung and, in certain places, Karl Rahner in *Von Sinn der Menschwerdung* (Hueber, Munich 1969). On this issue cf also John Thompson: "Barth and Balthasar in Ecumenical Dialogue" in Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris, ed.: *The Beauty of Christ* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1994) 171-178.

¹⁶ KB 362-363

¹⁷ "Revelation does not presuppose creation in such a way that it equates it with the act of revelation. In giving ultimate meaning to creation, revelation does not annul creation's own proper and original meaning." KB 242

¹⁸ Barth: *Church Dogmatics* 6, 174 (using Balthasar's numbering), cited KB 127; cf 361-363

always intended our nature for supernatural participation is because we have been designed and predestined to be the brothers of the Son made man.²⁰

In fact the christocentric perspective provides us with the focal point of our discussion of the nature-grace relationship. For it is Christ, to whom our nature is ordained and in whom its perfection lies, who is (in Schmaus' words) the "foundation and model of the unity of the natural and the supernatural".²¹

The synthesis that already subsists in him between divine and human nature is the model for all syntheses that Christians have to bridge between the two orders. Christians do not need to reconcile Christ and the world to each other, or to mediate between Christ and the world: Christ himself is the single mediation and reconciliation.²²

As Angelo Scola points out,²³ Balthasar had already said this as early as 1948 in his essay "Theology and Sanctity". Here he makes clear that in investigating the relationship between nature and supernature there is no need to abandon the standpoint of faith, to mediate and judge the relationship between God and the world, between revelation and reason: "All that is necessary is for him [man] to understand "the one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ" (1 Tim 2:5)".²⁴

There is "no mere connecting link between revelation and something else, such as human nature, or reason or philosophy",²⁵ "no vague synthesis of nature and the supernatural"²⁶ no abstract speculation about the relation between the two²⁷, "no common measure between nature and grace, reason and faith"²⁸: "Christ is the one and only criterion, given in the concrete, by which we measure the relations between God and man, grace and nature, faith and reason",²⁹ "the one synthesis in which God has established his relationship to the world".³⁰ The link between nature and supernature is in the incarnate Word of the Father, according to the eternal will of

¹⁹ KB 129 For Balthasar's understanding of freedom cf chapter four below.

²⁰ cf Balthasar: *A Theology of History* (H) (Ignatius, San Francisco 1994) 70 note 5

²¹ Schmaus: *Katholische* 212ff, cited KB 332

²² KB 332

²³ Angelo Scola: *Hans Urs von Balthasar A Theological Style* (Eerdmans, Michigan 1995) 46

²⁴ ET I 195 quoted in Scola: *Balthasar* 46

²⁵ ET I 194

²⁶ Ibid. 177

²⁷ Ibid. 162

²⁸ Ibid. 168

²⁹ Ibid. 162

³⁰ Ibid. 177

God that “human nature and its faculties are given their true centre when in Christ”, and “in him attain their final truth.”³¹

So, as well as entering the mid-century nature-supernature debate, conducted in the main on the abstract level, already in the forties and fifties Balthasar clearly expresses this characteristic approach, according to which the relationship between man’s natural seeking of God (an ascending movement out beyond himself), and grace, which is God finding us (a descending movement to us), is not to be discussed on the abstract plane through speculation on the relation between the natural and supernatural, but “is ultimately a matter of Christology. For in Christ, God and man, God has opened himself to the world and in this movement of descent has determined the course of every mode of ascent of man to him.”³² It is from this perspective—that in Christ God’s descent embraces man’s ascent—that we comprehend the inclusion of the natural in the supernatural³³, the relation of nature and supernature emphasised by de Lubac in the face of neo-scholastic extrinsicism. This strictly Christ-centred focus (which as regards the model of ascent within descent owes much to his patristic studies³⁴) is Balthasar’s major contribution to the formulation of the nature-grace relationship in contemporary theology. His insight, as he himself says, is not the presentation of “a new aspect” but “the application of the generally accepted Christology to the problem of revelation”, an application which had “perhaps...not yet been adequately worked out in detail.”³⁵

The determining factor of all the relationships between natural and supernatural is the fact that Christ possesses a human nature but is a divine person. His humanity is the expression and instrument of the divine³⁶ and in this way all movements of man’s nature upwards are brought to true fulfilment in the service of revelation, and in Christ, as the synthesis of the opposite movements of the natural ascent to God and the supernatural descent of God to man, all created being is able

³¹ Ibid. 194-5

³² Ibid. 162; 177; cf TD IV 343

³³ This is an incorporation and completion, not an invalidation. ET 177

³⁴ The influence of Maximus is especially significant (who gives it a christological context cf Th IV 382 and chapter five section D1 below). Gregory of Nyssa’s and Augustine’s development and correction of Plotinus are also important (cf Th IV 371-372 and chapter four section C1 below).

³⁵ ET I 47

to speak of eternal life.³⁷ (It is therefore not surprising that Balthasar might be attracted to Therese's words, 'everything is grace', chosen by Bernanos (the French author much favoured by Balthasar) as the closing words of the *Diary of a Country Priest*.³⁸)

Thus the synthesis of the *hypostatic union* takes on central importance in understanding our fulfilment in grace. Indeed because the divine nature is necessarily transcendent, participation in God's eternal life "can only be explained by taking as our starting point the hypostatic union in Christ."³⁹ Here we see that "the infusion of the divine identity does not involve any strain or distortion of the creature's potential, for it takes place through God's own condescension and abasement to the forms of creaturely non identity."⁴⁰ Because of his identity with our nature (bringing it "into the unity of the God-man in order to redeem it"⁴¹) we can have "real identification with him"⁴² (which preserves the uniqueness of Christ), a *participatory* identification making the relation of Christ to follower more than mere exemplar. Being a follower means being a participator in the mystery of the hypostatic union.⁴³

Concentration of the nature-supernature relationship in the mediating, reconciling relationship between the humanity and divinity of Christ continues to have crucial significance for Balthasar; the hypostatic union is the key to the God-world relationship for "now, bound up with the world with the indivisible bond of the hypostatic union, he [God] will never again be without the world".⁴⁴ Christ, as God living a human life, is the concrete exchange (*Konkrete Austausch*) which secures the integration (*einzubergen*) of the earthly in the eternal⁴⁵ and also, in the hypostatic

³⁶ Ibid. 162-3; 57

³⁷ Ibid. 168; 176; 178; *Prayer* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1986) 203

³⁸ cf Th IV 374; 422 We will discuss the complex response to this maxim in chapter 5 and 8 below.

³⁹ ET I 165

⁴⁰ Ibid. 179-80

⁴¹ Ibid. 58; cf *Theodrama* II (Th II) 409.

⁴² ET 59

⁴³ Ibid. 165 "an inchoate act of presence where he is, developing, when and as he wills, into an imitation of him."

⁴⁴ H 70 note 5

⁴⁵ TD IV 343

union, embraces both the human race as a species and the unique individual persons.⁴⁶

Strangely though Balthasar never committed himself to a properly worked out understanding of the union of the two natures in the person of Christ, simply stating that it was “the generally accepted christology”⁴⁷ that was to be applied to the problem of the nature-grace relationship and devoting just a lengthy footnote in the *Theo-drama* to “the appropriate categories for thinking about the unity of the person of Christ in the analogy of his natures”, a topic about which he “cannot enter into a detailed discussion”.⁴⁸ Whilst elsewhere in the same volume a more pneumatologically ‘mediated’ understanding of the relation of divinity and humanity in Christ is favoured,⁴⁹ a more stark, direct model is sometimes used as regards the actions and words of the God-man (his humanity being the instrument of the divine), and this role of the Spirit is not even mentioned in his christocentric explication of the nature-grace relationship (or in the christological analogy of being to which we are about to turn). Bearing in mind the centrality of the hypostatic union in Balthasar’s christocentric interpretation of our topic this deficiency in his christology does appear to be a weak point in his reformulation of the question (especially bearing in mind the leaning towards distinction—at the expense of union—in Przywara’s christological approach⁵⁰). Nevertheless the focus on the human-divine relationship in Christ develops into a striking use of the chalcedonian definition (as we shall see later⁵¹) and is also expressed distinctively in Balthasar’s christological analogy of being, our next topic of consideration.

⁴⁶cf Th II 210

⁴⁷ET I 47

⁴⁸Th III 228 note 68; cf Scola: *Balthasar* 79

⁴⁹Th III 184ff

⁵⁰cf the following section (B)

⁵¹cf chapter 5 section D1 below

B Christological analogy of being

1 *The concrete analogy of being*

A distinctive feature of Balthasar's christocentric treatment of our topic is his understanding of Christ as the answer to all our questions on the nature-grace relationship, precisely as *the analogy of being in the concrete*.

In Balthasar's use of the analogy of being in *Karl Barth* to elucidate the nature-grace relationship we have seen that grace emphasises *similarity* (participation), but precisely by making known the ever greater *distance* to God. Now this greater similarity within ever-greater dissimilarity of grace is achieved concretely, not through the rapturous dragging of man from the world to God, but through God's descent into the world to the point of being "in the 'form of *sin*'" ("which could not be more dissimilar to God"), that is, through the redemptive *Kenosis* of the incarnation. Thus it is *in Christ* that we see what similarity can mean (adoption) and what dissimilarity can mean (going as far as "God's own abandonment of himself").⁵² We see how grace does not eradicate authentic distance (in Gethsemane, cross and the holy fear of God that lasts into eternity) yet how it totally irradiates "even the most God forsaken realm—where sin took hold and reigned—...chosen as *the* site of God's revelation in Christ."⁵³ Jesus Christ then is the *concrete analogy of being*. He is "the definitive analogy between God and the creature", and not just "in general terms": "he took on the form of the concrete analogy between the God of wrath and grace and between the creature both condemned and redeemed", the Cross revealing what sin is, Easter showing the power of grace.⁵⁴ Christ *is* grace, expressed concretely, the Advocate before the Father through whom the believer's inner reality is transformed (as he interprets the believer's broken works in the light of grace and love, and presents them thus to the Father).⁵⁵

⁵² KB 286

⁵³ Ibid. 287

⁵⁴ Ibid. 376 The interval that he is the measure of thus includes the distance of sin (cf chapter 6 section C3).

⁵⁵ Ibid. 373

Przywara's work can be said to point towards an "ultimately christological interpretation of the analogy of being",⁵⁶ because of the location of the appearance of the natural creature-Creator relation "in the supernatural trinitarian One",⁵⁷ of nature and reason as "exclusively a reason and nature elevated and redeemed in the concrete supernatural order";⁵⁸ for "everything bears without exception, either consciously or unconsciously, in varying degrees, the one supernatural God in Christ in the Church' as its ultimate form".⁵⁹ Logic and ontology are thus judged by a "christological, historical and actualist standard".⁶⁰ This is apparent in Przywara's early work but is much clearer in the second period. Here he explicitly states that it is in the grace of redemption in Christ that being and history, reason and thought (precisely by preserving their natural form) have their final form; that "Christianity means: the incarnation, redemption on the Cross, incarnation and redemption as Church" and Christian philosophy therefore consists in Christian transformation of an "originally sinful philosophy' into a 'redeemed philosophy'".⁶¹ This is why Przywara unrelentingly reduces all aspects to the single focal point of "God in the crucified Christ in the crucified Church".⁶² All explicit statements concerning the relationship between God and man are drawn "into his dialectic of intersecting cross beams, where the 'crossing' of a positive statement by a negative one imitates the true Cross".⁶³ They then move toward the true statement of faith, alternating between an Ignatian 'application of the senses' to the divine truth made flesh and the ultimate mystery beyond this. However this christological *perspective* on analogy is not the same as an explicit *christological analogy of being* as we have just seen applied to Balthasar's understanding of nature. Balthasar is not simply repeating the insights of his master, but has used them in a distinctive way—and one which seems to be less exclusively preoccupied with a radical cross-centred dialectic.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 328

⁵⁷ Przywara: "Reichweite" in *Scholastik* (1940) 339f cited KB 328 note 10

⁵⁸ Ibid. 362 cited KB 329 note 10

⁵⁹ Ibid. 527 cited KB 329 note 10

⁶⁰ KB 329

⁶¹ Przywara: "philosophy" in *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* (1949), 1-9 cf KB 255-257

⁶² KB 329

⁶³ Ibid.

Balthasar develops and crystallises his understanding of the analogy of being inherited from Przywara. By the time we get to the *Theo-drama* he has a more fully worked out christological analogy of being at his disposal and the development of, indeed divergence from, Przywara's position is more explicitly identifiable. Balthasar locates the root of this divergence in Przywara's exaggerated emphasis on analogy of being as a law of *difference* between God and creature.⁶⁴ According to Balthasar it was the particular version of the text of the Lateran Council's definition on which Przywara based his understanding of analogy of being that led him to lay such an unnecessarily exaggerated emphasis on this aspect of *difference*.⁶⁵ Balthasar sees the fact that Przywara never produced a christology as an implication of this unbalanced interpretation. But christology is for Balthasar the key to the whole question. It therefore seems unlikely that Przywara could have developed the specific *christological analogy of being* proposed by Balthasar without subjecting his own understanding to substantial revision. Even in his christocentric perspective the emphasis is on contradiction and otherness (God in the *crucified* Christ in the *crucified* Church), because for Przywara the movement of analogy is uniquely made known in the Son's adoption of radical difference to God (sin and death) on the cross.⁶⁶ By positively focusing the central meaning of the analogy of being in Christology, *in the very being of the person of Christ and all his acts*, Balthasar develops the insight that he had acquired from Przywara, but in a way that Przywara could not have done himself in his increasingly radical emphasis on difference. We have gone beyond the christological significance and centre that Balthasar attributes to Przywara's position in *Karl Barth* ("christocentric starting point" "ultimately christological interpretation of the analogy of being"⁶⁷) to Christ,

⁶⁴ Th III 220; Medard Kehl in the Introduction to *The von Balthasar Reader* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1982) 21.

⁶⁵ Th III 220 However if we compare the version Przywara read ("Inter Creatorem et creaturam non potest *tanta* similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda"), putting great emphasis on the *tanta* ("however great the similarity—even by supernatural agency—the dissimilarity is *even greater*"), with the version found in the new edition of Denzinger (which omits the *tanta*: "inter creatorem et creaturam non potest similitudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda." (DS 806)) it is not really clear why using the former should prompt a greater emphasis on difference.

⁶⁶ Medard Kehl: *von Balthasar Reader* 21

⁶⁷ KB 328



the Son of God incarnate, *as* the analogy of being in the concrete, embracing and mediating all closeness as well as distance between God and man. In his intra-trinitarian perspective distance is for the sake of authentic closeness.⁶⁸

Balthasar does not carry out this development by denying the law of insurmountable difference between divine uncreated nature and created nature, the “essential abyss” central to Przywara’s use of the *analogia entis*. The union of the two natures in Christ is not an exception to this rule, nor an eradication of the element of difference. It is the mystery of his person, bridging the abyss between created and uncreated without harm to his unity.⁶⁹ For his created nature, as well as being separated from the Creator by the chasm of creatureliness, is drawn into the act by which the Son is begotten from the Father, as the possession of the divine person of the Son,⁷⁰ who, “measuring the immeasurable realm of the *analogia entis* as he strides though it”, has come to dwell as a man among men “identifying himself (who is God) with this being (man)”.⁷¹ His person, as the ultimate union of divine and created being “must constitute the final proportion [*Mass*] between the two” and it is thus, as the divine Son who becomes man, that he must be the concrete analogy of being itself,⁷² the measure of the created uncreated relationship. In the unity of his divine and human natures he constitutes the proportion of every interval between God and man⁷³ and every closeness.⁷⁴ It is thus that he is the concrete measure of the human-divine relationship,⁷⁵ of nearness and distance from God,⁷⁶ of the nature-grace relationship.⁷⁷ As the abstract philosophical expression of likeness within ultimate difference between divine and created is *concretised* and made *theological* the whole issue of the apparent ‘clash’ between the analogy of being and of faith is now focused on and resolved in him in the unconfused unity of the two

⁶⁸ cf eg TD IV 343; Th III 41f

⁶⁹ Th III 220

⁷⁰ ET I 176

⁷¹ Th III 227

⁷² Th II 220; 267

⁷³ H 70 n 5

⁷⁴ The *summit* of the creaturely attitude before God, obedience, is found archetypically in him, rooted in his mission as eternal son. cf Marc Ouellet: “Paradox and/or Supernatural Existential” *Communio* 18 1991 274.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 273

⁷⁶ ET I 177

natures in his one person. It now becomes the norm for *every* relation between divine and created.

We must be clear that precisely as the final proportion of the created and uncreated natures, Christ is not *outside* the analogy. It applies to “the highest union between divine and created being, in the God-man himself”.⁷⁸ The *analogia entis* between God and creature, “albeit in a fundamental and ultimate “greater dissimilarity”, goes right through the incarnate Son of God.”⁷⁹ It is important that as the new Adam who has taken on a real humanity he stands within the analogy of being in which all created reality stands, even though as regards his divine person the aspect of similarity is in fact equality, a sharing of a unity of nature with the Father in the Holy Spirit.⁸⁰ Analogy is not overstepped in the direction of identity.⁸¹ By virtue of his true divinity we can say that “he transcends the analogy”, but “more precisely, that he stands on both sides of the analogy, *that the analogy goes right through the centre of his consciousness*”.⁸² At the same time though, in recognising his relationship to the creature, we must not lose sight of the fact that he actually possesses the divine pole of the *analogia entis*. It is by virtue of this that he can undertake the self-emptying of the incarnation in the first place.⁸³

2 Analogy and participation

Now if this is the relation of the incarnate Son to the analogy of being, what about the status of those who have sonship through participation in him?

The difficult question will be to explain what the situation is of the man who is made to share in the privilege of Jesus’ divine Sonship,⁸⁴ a ‘difficulty’ which is precisely the concern of a doctrine of grace.

According to the fourth Lateran Council the similarity within dissimilarity in the creature-Creator relationship is of universal application and so “must extend to the

⁷⁷ Ibid. 162

⁷⁸ Th III 221; II 267; H 53ff

⁷⁹ Th III 203

⁸⁰ Th II 406

⁸¹ Th III 222

⁸² Th II 407 Balthasar’s italics

⁸³ Ibid. 267-8

⁸⁴ Ibid. 407

creature's supernatural elevation, through grace, to divine Sonship".⁸⁵ The analogy includes *supernatural* likeness and therefore remains a principle of great significance in the life of grace, expressed in that rhythm of 'the greatest intimacy united to ever-growing reverence'⁸⁶, which, when we consider the anthropology of the *Theo-drama*,⁸⁷ we will see is a new rhythm in Christ henceforward determining all anthropology.

This central Christian understanding of the grace of participation with its abiding distinction between God and the creature is of pivotal importance to Balthasar. It is crucial for him that in the face of non-Christian understandings of fulfilment and post-Christian anthropologies it is upheld in contrast to models of identity and confusion, or fantasies on the part of man "that the dimensions opened up to him by free grace are his by nature, are postulates of his", such that the distance in the analogy is something that he can simply 'jump over' and then "settle down in God's realm as if it were his own".⁸⁸ It is this fallacy that Balthasar seeks to refute whilst maintaining that transferral to God's realm is precisely what we are made for and that the creature-God relationship is truly a participatory one through the incarnate Son. This authentic understanding of participation, as we shall see, is a major preoccupation in his treatment of human fulfilment in the *Theo-drama*. In fact it is the distinction between creation and participation that Balthasar ultimately insists upon as the distinction between nature and grace.⁸⁹

The christological law of the analogy of being then is absolutely central to *theo-drama*.⁹⁰ It is the fact that there is this kind of relationship between creature and Creator (a dynamic likeness that never 'catches up' with the ever-greater God) that makes possible the enduring dramatic quality of their relations. The inalienable differentiation of the analogy is the necessary presupposition of genuine encounter, exchange, confrontation and co-operation; and the fact that the analogy of likeness within unlikeness is conceived of dynamically means the drama never comes to a

⁸⁵ Th III 221

⁸⁶ cf eg Th II 407, 260 and chapter 1 section D above.

⁸⁷ cf chapter 6 below

⁸⁸ Ibid. 407

⁸⁹ *In Retro* 118

stand still. This centrality of the *analogia entis* for theo-dramatic theory is fundamentally christological because the drama that the analogy thus bespeaks has its “concrete centre” in Christ in the relations between the two natures in the one person, as we shall see in more detail in Part II of the thesis.

C ‘Intra-trinitarian’ christocentrism

Even in *Karl Barth*, Balthasar’s christological elucidation of the analogy of being is grounded *intra-trinitarianly*. The “similarity of the creature with the ever dissimilar God” is elucidated by the fact that the very possibility of the God-creature distinction is grounded in the ‘distance’ between Father and Son (in the unity of the Holy Spirit).⁹¹ Thus the distance entailed in the formal concept of nature which we discussed in the previous chapter has a *theological* foundation:

all creation is grounded in the Logos, more exactly, in Jesus Christ. And the possibility of creation being distinct from God derives ultimately from the *divine* Son’s readiness to empty himself in service and obedience to his Father.⁹²

Whilst then the formal concept of nature is a presupposition for the incarnation, on a higher level it “has for its presupposition the Son’s willingness to make this descent into creation”.⁹³ It is specifically in this sense that Christ is the *a priori* of creation. It is fundamentally this grounding of the possibility of the God-creature distance in the intra-trinitarian relation and distance between Father and Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit (going all the way to abandonment on the Cross) that elucidates the analogy of being, the similarity of the creature with the ever dissimilar God.⁹⁴ The personal trinitarian life is therefore the *goal* of our natural substrate (in participation) and its *ground* (as the deepest foundation of natural distance; ‘the condition for its possibility’). And ultimately the dialectic of the life of grace expressed by the analogy of being—that is, the stronger the union, the clearer the difference—is specifically associated with the mystery of the Holy Spirit, anticipating the pneumatological focus we will consider in the *Theo-drama*. It is in

⁹⁰ cf eg Th IV 380

⁹¹ KB 286; 292

⁹² Ibid. 287

⁹³ Ibid. “...just as the diver is connected to the diving board, whose purpose and teleology exist only so that the diver may leap from it.”

the Spirit's impenetrable mystery, Balthasar says, that, according to Paul "we are given an ever-increasing share in God's nature as spirit the more we are truly identified with our own creaturely nature as spirit."⁹⁵

It is quite striking to find here in *Karl Barth* this particular insight and expression (albeit brief) regarding the intratrinitarian grounding of the God-creature relationship so central to Balthasar's mature thought. This particular perspective means that it is not simply the hypostatic union, as though an act isolated in time, that is the key to the man-God relationship, but the eternal relationship of the Son to the Father in the Spirit, in which the hypostatic union is predestined and thus in which our brotherhood of the eternal son is also predestined.

In the *Theo-drama* Balthasar develops this pattern of thought in his understanding of the Son as the ground of creation in his begetting from the Father, such that an analogy is exposed between creation and the generation of the Son. Here Balthasar, keen to stress creation's locus as emphatically *in* but *other than* God,⁹⁶ develops the christological grounding of creation more and more explicitly in its trinitarian context.⁹⁷ Whilst the life of the Trinity must not be described as a "becoming" (the persons being co-eternal), the creaturely process of becoming can present an "image" of the primal life of the Trinity.⁹⁸ The key to understanding the existence of relative finite being alongside Absolute being, lies in the *imago trinitatis* quality of creaturely processes,⁹⁹ an insight absolutely central to his understanding of the world and its processes in the *Theo-drama*.¹⁰⁰ Difference is part of the Godhead (in the opposition of the persons). Thus "the 'not' ('the son is *not* the Father', and

⁹⁴ Ibid. 286; 292

⁹⁵ Ibid. 292 1 Cor 2: 9-16

⁹⁶ The creature is found within him (eg Th IV 329) for "there is nothing outside God" (IV 333 with reference to II 260ff). In our finitude we must think of ourselves as "others" in our relation to God, but as God is "everything", "perfect unity"—such that when we add the world to him we do not have any 'more'—finitude "cannot constitute any opposition to him". So rather than being the 'other' over against finite reality, God is the "non-aliud" the Non-other, as taught by Nicholas Cusanus and before him Eckhart (although the latter betrays "an extreme Neoplatonic ontology" V 434) II 193; cf also 230; 287; 428. This is also expressed in terms of the Augustinian "*Deus interior intimo meo*", "more interior to me than I am to myself" (eg II 230, 242, 421).

⁹⁷ cf Th II 287-288

⁹⁸ eg Ibid. 261; V 67

⁹⁹ Th II 261

¹⁰⁰ Balthasar traces his "trinitarian interpretation of the world's being" (Th V 68) back to high scholasticism whilst also engaging with contemporary considerations of the world's "triune constitution" (71).

so forth)” has “an infinitely positive sense”, and mutual ‘giving away’ belongs to the Trinity (the ‘*not* holding onto’ the divine nature’ of the Son’s *kenosis*, the Father’s begetting of the Son and the Spirit’s self-giving “to the love of Father and Son—which he is”¹⁰¹). God does not need the world, but whilst we “must put a caesura between the eternal Yes uttered by God’s will to himself and his eternal life and the Yes which seals the decision to create”,¹⁰² the freedom in which God determines that the world shall exist is, according to its nature, none other than the freedom by which he wills eternally to be what he is.¹⁰³ So there is an analogical relationship between God’s yes to himself and his yes to creation.

The fact that it is specifically in the Son that the world is grounded in God is elucidated in the development of an *analogy* between the world’s indebtedness to God for its existence and the Son’s indebtedness to the Father for his divinity (which must owe something to Eckhart’s *identification* of the generation of the Son and the creation of the world¹⁰⁴). Balthasar is explicit:

...there is an analogy between the Son’s being begotten and the creature’s being freely and sovereignly created by God.¹⁰⁵

For the world can only receive its possibility and reality in the eternal Son, “who eternally owes his divine being to the Father’s generosity.”¹⁰⁶ As the Father’s eternal Word, the Son creates the world—but not only instrumentally: ‘through him’, means ‘in him’ and ‘for him’ too (Col I: I6); he is “the world’s pattern and hence its goal”.¹⁰⁷ The world is thus grounded in the Son “according to its ability”.¹⁰⁸ Balthasar finds the fundamentals of this teaching in high scholasticism, particularly Thomas and Bonaventure.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰¹ Th II 261

¹⁰² Ibid. The kind of relationship we are talking about here may be illuminated by Balthasar’s use of the same linguistic metaphor to describe the unity and distinction between Jesus’ active life and ‘his hour’ cf IV 231ff.

¹⁰³ Th II 261

¹⁰⁴ Th V 439; 450; I 551 This position was gradually abandoned by his disciples. cf note 122 below

¹⁰⁵ Th III 229 note 68; also II 261f, 286, III 35f, 518; IV 328, 330-331, V 81, 88 (Adrienne von Speyr)

¹⁰⁶ Th II 261; “The world can only be created with the Son’s ‘generation’” IV 326; both generation and creation are a form of divine kenosis. IV 323

¹⁰⁷ Th II 261

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 262

¹⁰⁹ Th V 61-65; II 262

This location in the Son is of course a location in the totality of the Godhead and Balthasar suggests we think of the world as the gift of the Father (begetter and creator) to the Son, because he wishes to sum up all things in heaven and earth in him, as head (Eph I: I). Just as the Son receives the gift of the Godhead, he accepts the gift of the world as an opportunity for giving thanks and glory to the Father. When he has brought the world to fulfilment, “he will lay the entire Kingdom at his feet, so that God (the Father) may be all in all (I Cor 15:24, 28).¹¹⁰ Meanwhile the Spirit is given the world by both and can now implement in and through creation what he is eternally, “the reciprocal glorification of Father and Son”.¹¹¹

These endeavours on Balthasar’s part to understand the God-creature relationship in terms of the God-God relationship mean that an interesting analogy is established between the God-man ‘distance’ and what Balthasar understands as intra-trinitarian ‘distance’, *diastase*. Literally this means ‘separation’, a strong word, used for example in modern Greek, to refer to a married couple who no longer live together, who are ‘separated’. Words like ‘distance’, ‘separation’, ‘gulf’ are therefore not traditionally applied to the inner life of God in Christian theology—indeed John Damascene asserted that God is *adiastase*.¹¹² However this is not the case in Balthasar’s doctrine of the Trinity. Here, without actually intending to deny the unity of the Godhead,¹¹³ there is a preoccupation with the “*diastasis* of the divine ‘Persons’ in the unity of the divine nature”,¹¹⁴ with an “absolute, infinite “distance”,¹¹⁵ an “eternal separation in God”,¹¹⁶ such that the distinctiveness between the persons is so total that it constitutes a “gulf”.¹¹⁷ For Balthasar the begetting of the Son is understood as “an incomprehensible and unique

¹¹⁰ Th II 262

¹¹¹ Balthasar maintains that this grounding of creation in God does not involve a ‘contraction’ of God to make room for creation: “the ‘nothing-out-of-which’ the world came into being can only be sought in infinite freedom itself: that is, in the realm of creatable being opened up by divine omnipotence and, at a deeper level, by the Trinitarian “letting-be” of the hypostatic acts. Th II 263f

¹¹² *De Fide Orthodoxa* Lib I in *Patrologia Graeca* vol 94 827, 829. I am grateful to Demetrios Bathrellos for drawing my attention to this.

¹¹³ Th V 81f; 518 (Adrienne von Speyr); III 333; II 258; V 94

¹¹⁴ Th II 288 (TD II/I 262); Th III 228

¹¹⁵ Th IV 323 (“absoluten, unendlichen Abstands” TD III 301); “...absolute distance/distinction...” IV 333 (“...absoluten Distanz...” TD III 310); “distance within the Trinity” (Th IV 380); “...distance (*Distanz*) between God and God” (II 266)

¹¹⁶ Th IV 327 (“*Trennung*” TD III 304)

¹¹⁷ “...the gulf of the Divine Persons’ total distinctiveness...” Th IV 326

‘separation’ of God from himself”.¹¹⁸ It is, a *kenosis* on the Father’s part¹¹⁹ in which his renunciation of Godhead (not being God for himself alone) gives the Son “equally substantial” possession of it (for it is truly given and not just lent), but without the Father losing himself.¹²⁰ The Son is thus infinitely other, but, Balthasar maintains, an infinite otherness of infinite loving relation which grounds and surpasses both all we understand by separation and all we understand by relationship.¹²¹ The distance between God and man then is grounded in this ‘distance’ (*Distanz*) between God and God.¹²² In fact for Balthasar the creature’s metaphysical and theological locus in God is indeed “the diastasis (*Diastase*) of the divine ‘Persons’ in the unity of the divine nature”.¹²³ For if the creature is located in God in the Son, then this is grounded in the fact there *is* a Son as well as the Father, and Spirit as well as a Son and Father, that is in the fact there is distinction and opposition in God, the inter-penetration of the persons involving each one ‘letting the others be’ (and not holding on to the divine nature¹²⁴). Balthasar therefore thinks that the genuine distinction of God and creature is no longer a problem “because ultimately it is grounded in the real difference between the divine hypostases”¹²⁵ Or again:

“the distance between heaven and earth can only be secondary (“economic”) within the primary (“immanent”) distinction between Father and Son in the Spirit; it is to be seen as an expression of this latter, all-embracing distinction”.¹²⁶

Balthasar maintains this does not mean that the ‘not’ that characterises the creature—it is ‘not’ God and cannot exist of itself—is identical with the ‘not’ found within the Godhead. However, the latter constitutes the deepest reason why the creaturely ‘not’ does not cause the analogy of being between creature and God to break down. The infinite distance between the world and God is grounded in the

¹¹⁸ Th IV 325 (“...eine so unfafßbare und unüberbietbare ‘Trennung’ Gottes von sich selbst...” TD III 302)

¹¹⁹ cf Th IV 323 The thinking here is related to that of Bulgakov.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 327; III 518-9 This means that, with F Ulrich, there is a coincidence of poverty and wealth in God. This primal kenosis grounds the subsequent kenosis of creation, the establishment of the covenant and the redemptive kenosis of the identification of the Logos with the man Jesus. Th IV 323-333

¹²¹ Th IV 325

¹²² cf Th II 266; IV 380 Here, perhaps in preference to Eckhart’s *identification* of the Son’s generation and our creation, we see the influence of Ruysbroeck for whom the Father contemplates the otherness of the world of creation in the otherness of the eternally begotten Son. V 457-8

¹²³ Th II 288 (TD II/I 262); IV 333

¹²⁴ Th II 261

¹²⁵ Ibid. 288

other, prototypical distance between God and God¹²⁷ and the Son is the presupposition of any bifurcation (including, as we shall see later the ‘bad’ separation of sin and suffering¹²⁸). So whilst for Barth the analogy of being breaks down because of the fundamental opposition in constitution of ‘out of itself’ and ‘not out of itself’, for Balthasar the analogy is ultimately based on the fact that this God-creature opposition is in fact grounded in an opposition internal to God.

Whilst Balthasar may think this perspective solves problems for the God-creature distinction we may find that it makes problems for God. However we will postpone any further comment on the introduction of concepts like ‘distance’ into the Trinity until we have encountered other aspects of Balthasar’s uncovering of the ground of intra-mundane characteristics and processes as part of an *imago trinitatis* later on in this thesis.

As the link between the Son’s begetting and creation shows God’s eternal intention for creation to have a place in God (in the Son), to be ‘begotten in grace’, the analogy between creation and begetting is a dynamic one, touching not only our origin but also our orientation towards our end. Later we will consider how *adoption* as well as creation is associated with the begetting of the Son.¹²⁹ We shall see that Balthasar uses personalist models to elucidate the analogy between the primal life of the triune God and the origin, destiny and fulfilment of the finite creature, such that we learn from the interpersonal constitution of the triune life that the relation of finite spiritual creature to the Infinite creator is (amazingly!) also a personal ‘I’, ‘thou’ relationship, and a dynamic one too.

D Christ as concrete universal

Finally, we will briefly touch upon a further aspect of Balthasar’s christocentrism relevant to our topic that we find traces of in *Karl Barth* and which endures into Balthasar’s mature work: the *christological* understanding of the relationship between (concrete) particular and universal.

¹²⁶ Th III 530

¹²⁷ Th II 266

¹²⁸ Th IV 325 (TD III 302)

¹²⁹ cf chapter 5 below

Balthasar's preoccupation with the concrete and historical is centred upon the unique, concrete, particularity of Christ. Understanding the Christ event as the *concretissimum* on which the meaning of all else must rest was crucial in Balthasar's discussions with Barth, for whom the Catholic analogy of being undermined this christocentrism which "interprets all secular and worldly relations and realities in terms of God's self interpreting Word, Jesus Christ."¹³⁰ Balthasar's exposition of Catholic christocentrism is clearly in concord with a recognition of the incarnation and the history between God and man that flows from it as "the *concretissimum*, concreteness personified," from which we must not distance ourselves in abstraction. Any authentic abstraction and development of universal concepts is merely relative to this.¹³¹ But for Balthasar, precisely as the most concrete reality, the source of all meaning, the Christ event is "the fullest and richest of realities", inexhaustive in interpretative value and containing "room for the use of universal concepts, categories, properties and finally of Being itself."¹³² For it is precisely as *concretissimum* that it is *universalissimum*.¹³³ So Balthasar's recognition of Christ as the most concrete reality of all, to which all must be referred, is not solely influenced by Barth's understanding, (the narrowness of which he considered a 'dead end'¹³⁴). Rather Balthasar realised that the unique '*most concreteness*' of the existence of Christ makes it the *most inclusive* reality and it is in this direction that the significance of Christ as *concretissimum* lies: hence its focus as that point at which the age old problem of the relation between particular and universal finds its answer.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ KB 30; 37; 55; 383-384

¹³¹ Ibid. 384

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Th II 271

¹³⁴ cf section A above

¹³⁵ Philosophical nominalism is an erroneous digression (although Balthasar takes neither a straightforward realist or nominalist way forward). Theology, as a true science of singulars that are also general and normative, needs a philosophy that protects both the essential and realist aspects; that is, it must recognise that "the incarnate Logos is the norm and fulfilment of all authentic *logoi* in nature and history." KB 336 Balthasar had already set out an understanding of the relation of concrete and universal in Christ in an article on the characteristics of Christianity published two years before the Barth book. ("Drei merkmale des Christlichen" in *Wort und Wahrheit* (Wein) 4 1949 401-415 reprinted in expanded form in ET I 161-180, especially pp 170-171); cf also H 92 and Raymond Gawronski's exposition in "Jesus Christ Crucified Foundation of the Cosmos" *Communio* 23 Summer 1996 339-353.

Referring to the Christ-centred observations of Romano Guardini, which are clearly of importance in this area of his thought, Balthasar explains

the historical person of Jesus Christ is himself the essence from which all general and abstract categories of the being of the world and of nature have their measure...It is not Christ who is in the world, but the world is in Christ.¹³⁶

He quotes at some length from passages in Guardini's *Wesen des Christentums*, first published over twenty years before *Karl Barth* in 1929, which locate this relationship between singular and universal for us in the historical person of Christ:

Every realm of being contains certain foundational determinants that establish it in its unique character and set it off from the rest...These presuppositions or categories are necessarily general and universal. But, in our case, it is different. Where elsewhere the general concept stands, here there appears a historical person.¹³⁷

As Balthasar himself says some years later, it is Christ's concrete existence that provides us with our norm.¹³⁸

Everything in this world, singular and general, depends upon this uniqueness of Christ, which is the manifestation of the uniqueness of God as the One, the Unique.¹³⁹ But through Christ we are called to a *participation* in this uniqueness. We are destined through his uniqueness to a unity in which our creaturely non-identity of 'I' and 'we' is enriched unsurpassably. By grace Christ lets us participate in this uniqueness of his that is not of this world, by giving it to the Church, his body, his bride. This participation does not jeopardise Christ's own uniqueness nor does it do violence to what is specific in the creature, "since God himself in Christ, is "Son of Man", one man, that is among all the rest".¹⁴⁰ So participation embraces the fulfilment of our very particularity (in communion with that of others) in the particularity of Christ, given in communion with his body the Church. We will see that Balthasar maintains his interest in this crucial reality in the *Theo-drama*.

It is in the *Theo-drama* that we shall find the flowering of a systematic dramatic approach to this relation of particular and universal in the uniqueness of Christ (especially in the identity of person and mission in Christ from whom the 'roles' of

¹³⁶ KB 329

¹³⁷ R Guardini: *Wesen des Christentums* (1929; 1940) 68-9 cited KB 337

¹³⁸ "Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics" in *Principles of Christian Morality* (Ignatius San Francisco, 1986) 79, 82; cf E Babini: "Jesus Christ, Form and Norm of Man according to Hans Urs von Balthasar" *Communio* 16 1989 448-457

¹³⁹ ET I 171

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 180

the drama are allotted¹⁴¹). For his uniqueness does not oppose but enhances his universal interest, his universality, contained in concentrated form in his mission, so manifested in the ‘shattering’ and outpouring of his passion that no spectator remains untouched.¹⁴² His personal drama makes a universal claim. The tragic dimension of his personal existence illuminates “the significance and change of meaning of all intra-mundane tragedy”¹⁴³ and something of his drama’s own catholic and concrete universality is communicated to the individual human destiny giving it a universal range (as found in the doctrine of the communion of saints).¹⁴⁴ Thus the plurality of destinies are drawn into a concrete universal point of unity which maintains their plurality as a function of this unity,¹⁴⁵ unlike Idealist and Socialist claims to universality, where personal drama is lost in its integration into the epic “Odyssey of the Spirit”. In the communion of saints in Christ each particular destiny has a universal (if uncalculable) influence.¹⁴⁶ As this incorporation into him comes about as a result of his unlimited, representative identification with us (including sin), his role as the *concretissimum universalissimum* not only applies when we prescind from the concrete historical modalities of the world’s existence, but also in the worst of these modalities, that of fallen human nature, when his obedience “represents the concrete universal idea of the relationship between heaven and earth in the form of crucified love”.¹⁴⁷

E Concluding summary

In this chapter I have shown how Balthasar’s contribution to the mid-century nature grace debate is ultimately christocentric and cannot be accurately considered without full awareness of this.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ cf chapter 7 below and also the related question of the logos-logoi, prototype-copy in chapter 5 section C.

¹⁴² Th II 32-33

¹⁴³ Ibid. 49

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 50

¹⁴⁵ Eph 1: 3-10 and 4: 7-16

¹⁴⁶ Th II 51

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 271

¹⁴⁸ This appears to have been missed in Stephen Duffy’s treatment of Balthasar’s contribution to the nature-grace debate in *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1992) 115-134.

Christ is the inner unity of theology, the ground and the goal of creation, the immediate implication for the nature-grace relationship being the adoption of de Lubac's dialectical understanding of nature (because the christocentric understanding of creation means that nature is created for a supernatural end from the start, but, because of the utterly transcendent nature of this end, it is beyond our natural capacities to achieve it of ourselves). The nature-grace question is a matter of christology, for Christ is "the foundation and model of the unity of natural and supernatural"¹⁴⁹—the relationship between the humanity and divinity of Christ being the crucial factor here such that our participation in the divine life is understood in terms of our relation to the hypostatic union. As the very union of created and uncreated, he is *the* proportion of the divine-human relation and thus the *concrete analogy of being*. Balthasar is apparently moving away from Przywara's marked emphasis on the distance of the cross as the focus of the christological *analogia entis* in favour of the union of creaturely and divine in Christ's personal constitution (although there is a lack of specificity about the nature of this union in his christology). As the norm for all creaturely relationships, he is the *concrete universal* and he is the measure of all human action.

The christocentrism is grounded intra-trinitarianly. In *Karl Barth* the 'distance' of Father and Son is the theological foundation of the distance entailed in the nature concept, whilst the *Theo-drama* develops the idea that the God-world distinction is grounded in the distinction between the persons of the Trinity and depicts creation and adoption 'taking place with' the eternal begetting of the Son from the Father. In the next chapter we will continue our discussion of Balthasar's christocentric understanding of the nature-grace relationship by considering its dramatic quality.

¹⁴⁹KB 332 (Schmaus)

Chapter 3

A christocentric drama

The path is determined and illuminated by the goal one has in view, and this applies particularly to this unique path of salvation history, which only attains its goal as a result of the dialectic between, on the one hand, discontinuity and, on the other hand, a fulfilment going beyond all expectation (cf Paul in particular) and inner fulfilment (cf Matthew and James).¹

In his new approach to the nature-grace relationship we have seen that Balthasar wished to avoid a “christological constriction”² that tends to give the order of grace priority over the order of creation or place “such one-sided emphasis on God’s will to give himself in Christ that the human response pales into relative insignificance”.³ We have mentioned Barth’s position in this context and later in this chapter we will see with what success Balthasar develops a corrective of this in his treatment of the two Adams in the *Theodrama*. However Balthasar also wished to avoid another rather different misrepresentation of the nature-grace relationship in which the orientation from nature to grace is so natural that grace almost seems to evolve from nature as that which is ‘bound to come’, and thus the distinctive character of grace appears to be jeopardised. As regards this latter tendency, Balthasar had growing anxieties about the development of the fresh approach to theology in the hands of theologians guided by Maréchal’s engagement with idealism. He is concerned that in this ‘transcendental Thomist’ approach the grace of Christ is so anticipated in transcendental subjectivity that the Christ event is inevitably no more than an explicit unfolding of what was already there in the first place. In adopting *dramatic* categories Balthasar is aware that, as well as consolidating a shift from essentialism, they provide a means of expression that confronts both of these flawed approaches.

¹ “Nine Propositions on Christian Ethics” in *Principles of Christian Morality* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1986) 77-78

² Th III 257; cf chapter 2 section A above.

³ Th III 253 n 71 with reference to R Haubst: *Von Sinn der Menschwerdung* (Hueber, Munich 1969)

A The theo-dramatic perspective

1 History and the dramatic

Christ is the centre, the foundation and the completion of history and there is therefore only one form of progress, that toward Christ,⁴ who is the condition of the possibility of there being any scene in history⁵ and, as true ground (alpha), is also the conclusion (omega)⁶—but without this christological embrace overcoming genuine historicity.⁷ Being the condition of the possibility of every scene in history means opening an area of freedom (within God’s freedom) in which man is given the scope to make history happen, but as an area belonging to Christ it is shaped according to the structures of his earthly existence.⁸ In the *Theo-drama* this is expressed in the idea that as well as being one of the actors⁹ Christ is the *acting area*, the *stage* on which the play takes place.¹⁰

The created order, the whole of history, is ordered so as to be the history of the Son incarnate which he fulfils, and yet the actual fulfilment so transcends the promise that precedes it as to make it completely impossible to anticipate. Man in history then does not naturally ‘evolve’ into his fulfilment by developing into the future, as though wholeness is “humanity itself, maturing through generations as it grows out of its own fragmentary existence.”¹¹ In the face of a smooth, natural progress to completion, a natural continuity between fragment and whole, the Christian understanding of completion in Christ alone stands out as distinctly *dramatic*. Grace does not emerge out of nature, rather “in the concrete, man and his concrete history, the power of creation

⁴cf KB 336 Balthasar wanted to engage with and refute an idealist understanding of history understood in terms of universal progress.

⁵*A Theology of History* (H) (Ignatius, San Francisco 1994) 65

⁶Th IV 46, 60, 66; Balthasar: *Man in History* (Sheed and Ward, 1968) 116

⁷This is disputed by a number of commentators. cf the discussion in section D below and chapter 9 note 1. For Balthasar’s “reciprocal subjection” of history to the Son and the Son to history cf H especially 51-65.

⁸H70f

⁹Th III 21, 120-121; 505-535

¹⁰Ibid. 41, 43-6, 60-63

and the power of grace, must *collide*".¹² The category of drama becomes central in Balthasar's expression of the Christian message.

2 Drama

An interest in the category of event, and even that of drama itself, is already evident before the *Theo-drama* in conjunction with Balthasar's focus on the concrete as opposed to the speculative. In *Karl Barth* he tells us that it is

a more concrete and positive theology that builds upon the historical fact of revelation and thus makes greater use of the categories that apply to *events*.¹³

He quotes Guardini:

This is the most fundamental meaning of revelation: that God not only is but acts; not only watches over but actively participates; not only fulfils but comes to us.¹⁴

A citation from F X Arnold actually refers to "the *drama* of revelation", revelation being "essentially event, deed, history, and not merely speech, doctrine, word." It is on this drama that all dogma rests.¹⁵

This gives a particular perspective to the treatment of man and his fulfilment in grace. "Revelation tells us what man is...by recounting the history of what God has done and is doing for us and with us to establish his reign in us."¹⁶ Grace is God's "involvement".¹⁷ Man is created to encounter him in the event of revelation¹⁸ and "the encounter with him in the event of grace renders everything else mere physical preparation and propaedeutic to this event".¹⁹

In the *Theo-drama* these concerns converge in the definitive choice of *drama*, as offering the categories best suited to the portrayal of God's action.²⁰ In the past

¹¹ *Man* 100

¹² Ibid. 198 (my italics)

¹³ KB 258

¹⁴ Guardini: *Die Offenbarung*, 76 cited in KB 342; in God "being and doing completely coincide." Schmaus: *Katholische Dogmatik I* 454 cited in KB 342

¹⁵ "Glaubensschwund und Glaubensverkündigung", *Die Warte* (Luxembourg, October 27, 1950) cited in KB 340

¹⁶ Schmaus: *Katholische Dogmatik II*, 277-278, cited in KB 340

¹⁷ Balthasar: *Engagement with God* (SPCK, London 1975) 27, 36

¹⁸ KB 340, with reference to Guardini

¹⁹ Ibid. 342

²⁰ cf Th I especially 9-87; Nichols: *No bloodless Myth* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 2000) 3-63; Oakes: *Pattern of Redemption* (Continuum, New York 1994) 217f, 221f; Thomas G Dalzell: *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Peter Lang, Bern 2000) 113-128; JB Quash: "'Between the Brutally Given and the Brutally, Banally Free': von Balthasar's

theology has tended to be conducted in the *epic* mode which reports events at a narrative distance (such that God is ‘He’), as opposed to the *lyrical* mode associated with spirituality (in which God is ‘Thou’).²¹ Drama recognises the need for precise reporting but from a *position of involvement* within the action of the events reported, because it is *God’s action* and there is therefore no ‘external standpoint’ from which it can be viewed. Drama is thus presented as the solution to the either/or of ‘epic’ theology and ‘lyrical’ spirituality.²² It is also understood as the mode towards which various trends in modern theology are tending but cannot reach,²³ and is shown to follow on naturally from the encounter and perception of revelation of the *Aesthetics*,²⁴ which is not just to be looked at, but is an action in which we are involved and to which we can only respond through action on our part. Dramatic categories are not imposed on theology: revelation is seen itself to be dramatic: “an action involving God and man”,²⁵ the history of an initiative on his part for his world, “a struggle between God and the creature over the latter’s meaning and salvation.”²⁶ Theology is full of dramatic tension: the inward, contemplative aspect oriented towards action, and the outward, dialogical aspect always questioning and searching, open to the ever fresh and ‘unexpected’ answers of the Spirit which generates the genuine pluriform unity of theology.²⁷

Balthasar’s apprehension of the nature-grace dialectic (which, as we shall see, in the *Theo-drama* is particularly focused on the question of freedom) is central to this appreciation of the usefulness of dramatic categories, for it means the natural order has an inherent dramatic tension which is adopted and brought to its proper end (through transformation) by the supernatural. “There is always a divine-human dramatic

Theology of Drama in Dialogue with Hegel” *Modern Theology* 13:3 July 1997 294-318; G O’Hanlon: “Theological Dramatics” in Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris, eds.: *The Beauty of Christ* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1994) 92-95; Steffen Lösel: “Murder in the Cathedral Hans Urs von Balthasar’s New Dramatisation of the Trinity” *Pro Ecclesia* V no 4 1996 430-431; cf also chapter 7 section A1 below.

²¹ Th II 43; 53-57; I 42

²² Th II 54-62, 532; I 16 For the influence of Hegel cf I 55-6. Hence Balthasar’s interest in Calderon’s dramatisation of theological epic (Thomas). (I 69)

²³ Th I 25-50

²⁴ eg Ibid. 15, 18

²⁵ Ibid. 130

²⁶ Ibid. 125; 122-3

tension”: for as God has given freedom to man his creation, man has some kind of knowledge of his origin (however obscured) and God is always involved in the world (although this is all that is apparent in the ‘anteroom’ of revelation).²⁸ Here, hovering on the boundary between natural and supernatural, Balthasar locates the central dramatic question of *role*—‘who am I?’ and ‘what is my part on the world stage?’—to which we shall return.

“Drama is essentially human action, action as a way of imparting meaning to existence in its search for self-realisation.”²⁹ It is a presentation of existence, of “life—nature embedded in the supernatural”,³⁰ a mirror used in the interests “of self-knowledge and the elucidation of Being”, but one which, according to Balthasar’s Christian perspective on existence, must point beyond itself, because existence, by virtue of its creatureliness, cannot be perfected essentially but only in supernatural grace.³¹ The relationship between drama and theology is thus one of nature to grace, for in the theatre man attempts a transcendence³² (which he cannot decisively conclude), an observation and judgement of his own truth, and in so doing ‘beckons’ the approach of revelation about himself, opening a door, parabolically, “to the truth of the real revelation.”³³

In the choice of drama the paradoxical character of spiritual existence (by nature only supernaturally fulfilled) can be explored in terms of *tragedy*. This is evident in the situation of finite existence—doomed never to satisfy the ‘infinite space’ within it but to be broken off by death³⁴. It also belongs to God’s plan of salvation because he takes on the tragic situation of man right to the bitter end,³⁵ and because the free creature’s

²⁷Ibid. 126-128

²⁸Ibid. 128-129

²⁹Ibid. 413; 411

³⁰Ibid. 11, 17

³¹Ibid. 86

³²Ibid. 20-21

³³Ibid. 12, cf 20-21

³⁴cf eg Th II 38f; 59 On the significance of death cf Th I 369-408; chapter 6 and chapter 9 section B below.

³⁵eg Th II 49; 54; 83-84 Regarding the compatibility of tragedy and Christianity cf I 72, 74 note 11, 86 (Przywara), 120-123 (R Schneider), 414, 425-435.

possibility of rejecting him becomes more serious once this definitive revelation of divine love has taken place, leading to a reciprocal escalation of love and hardened hate such that the triumph of God's final victory may be tinged with tragedy if part of his plan for the world thus fails³⁶. Drama also provides the tools for a trinitarian expression of God's immanence and transcendence: as Father he authors the play, in Christ he is actor in it, as Spirit he is director of it.³⁷ That God is thus *involved* in the history of the world, that he risks being affected, is central to this new dramatic mode for theology,³⁸ and the fact that we must act too we shall see is central to the dramatic presentation of the nature-grace relationship. The audience then are no mere spectators, but are open to being touched by the play's 'horizon', its "all surrounding framework of meaning",³⁹ such that a transcendent insight suddenly breaks forth in the action upon the stage with striking personal impact upon the individual.⁴⁰

The fundamental foundation to Christian theological dramatic theory is the analogy of being.⁴¹ This ineradicable distinction is the necessary presupposition of genuine opposition and interaction, whilst the aspect of likeness based on the *imago dei* is also central. Particularly relevant to our topic is the fact that drama presupposes the interaction of two *freedoms*: infinite freedom and finite freedom made in its image, whilst the concrete centre of theo-drama lies in the relationship between these two in Christ (this will be our topic in Part II). Central to our concerns in this chapter is the fact that the choice of drama means we are dealing with "complications, tensions, catastrophes and reconciliations"⁴² (as we find in our individual lives and our interaction with others), with a *struggle* between God and man and with the *unexpected* nature of the divine response.⁴³ Central to the appropriateness of dramatic categories is the fact that tension belongs *objectively* to drama. With its goal-orientation and evaluation of things with

³⁶ Th V 212 cf V 191-246 esp 201-203

³⁷ cf Th I 268-305; III 505-506, 514, 532-534

³⁸ Th I 31, 69, 130-131

³⁹ Nichols: *Bloodless* 33

⁴⁰ On Balthasar's triad of presentation, audience, horizon cf Th I 305-343; III 534-535.

⁴¹ Th IV 380

⁴² Th I 17; 413

reference to a presupposed order, it “expresses itself in passionate struggle”.⁴⁴ An absolute meaning is presented within something finite, is verified, contested, re-won or surpassed, through action and encounter, perhaps suffering and death, the key dramatic moments of *peripeteia* (‘turning’) and *anagnorisis* (‘discovery’) coming amidst a kaleidoscope of changes, complications and disentanglements.⁴⁵ There is no certainty as to how things will work out, rather tension between anticipation of the future and recapitulation of the past, and a precipitation towards the conclusion that hurtles along in “cascading events” yet is likewise “held back by delays, blockages, and the torment of excitement sustained”.⁴⁶ Theo-drama is full of vibrant movement back and forth, outpouring and receiving or opposing, distance and closeness, pain and joy. Much is made of exchanges, expectation and surprise, recapitulation and reversal, uncertainty and discovery, events and decisions with explosive impact. Indeed for Balthasar God himself is dramatic, “able to be the “One” the “Other” and the “Unifying””⁴⁷, in whom there is—not becoming, but ‘event’, ‘process’ (in the sense of procession),⁴⁸ as well as distance,⁴⁹ expectation, surprise⁵⁰. That the ‘world play’ is dramatic is dependent in the first place on the fact that creation images this trinitarian event from which it originates.⁵¹ There is certainly no steady, smoothly unfolding drift towards perfection for creation, but a startling drama—with tragic dimensions.

⁴³ cf eg Ibid. 125, 127-128

⁴⁴ E Staiger cited Ibid. 345

⁴⁵ Th I 345-8; 354-358.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 348

⁴⁷ Th III 531

⁴⁸ Th V 66-94 On the implications for the immutability of God cf 212-246

⁴⁹ cf chapter 2 section C

⁵⁰ Th V 79, 89, 90, 92-93, 104, 120, 126

⁵¹ Th III 531

B The dramatic relationship between the human and the divine

We have already seen something of the essential significance of the vertical descent of revelation for Balthasar in his defence of de Lubac's understanding of gratuity from above and in his christocentrism in which God's descent embraces man's ascent without nullifying it.

In the *Theo-drama* the significance of the vertical is also drawn out in giving the totality of meaning to horizontal history.⁵² This is the only location of final meaning for pre-Christian natural man. Failure to submit to Christianity's unique claim to the vertical axis as revelation from above, leaves human "upward" openness⁵³ looking for meaning from the horizontal and absolutising what are merely fragments of meaning.

This emphasis does not mean Balthasar solely employs an approach from above.⁵⁴ Indeed his theo-dramatics starts from 'frail human finitude'. The point is that in its 'unwholeness' and need for full meaning, human finitude should be seen from the perspective of the insoluble incompleteness and sinfulness of its concrete situation. Then the call of grace and the breaking in of the answer man seeks can be seen as descending from the divine initiative without which it is unknown. This is the *dramatic encounter*, the "lightning flash",⁵⁵ the collision,⁵⁶ with which Balthasar is concerned, the "impact"⁵⁷ of which unleashes irreversible influences upon world history.⁵⁸

1 'Anticipation', supernatural existential and dramatic tension

It is in the context of this keen awareness of the dramatic quality of revelation and the human search for fulfilment that the concern of the mature work about the supernatural

⁵² Th IV 71-3; II 335-426; I 29-30; for critiques of Balthasar's prioritising of the vertical cf chapter 9 note 1.

⁵³ Th IV 72

⁵⁴ G O'Hanlon's description of Balthasar's "rejection of theology 'from below'" in the article "The Legacy of Hans Urs von Balthasar" fails to acknowledge this. (*Doctrine and Life* 41 1991 401) For a more carefully considered analysis cf Dalzell: *Dramatic* 23-4, 34-35.

⁵⁵ Th II 250; I 229; 344

⁵⁶ cf *Man* 198

⁵⁷ Th II 251

existential can be located. We have mentioned already Balthasar's experimental, if tentative, use of the supernatural existential in chapter one. Now in the *Theo-drama* Balthasar explicitly rejects usage of the concept in the context of ideas about a universal 'anticipation' of revelation through the transcendental structures of man (although later we will see he never really denies a 'triadic' scheme and still himself employs the term using his own carefully limited definition of it⁵⁹).

In the first place Balthasar, following de Lubac, thinks that man's desire for the living God constitutes man's essence and so is entirely *natural*. There is no need then to introduce a supernatural existential to elevate his nature to desire for God as he is in himself as this desire belongs to man essentially, even though the fulfilment of this desire is out of proportion to his nature and he is entirely dependent on divine illumination just to know that this is his essence.⁶⁰ This paradoxical aspect to man's nature is prior to talk of any feature that might be called a 'supernatural existential' and is central to the *dramatic* character of human finitude.

Secondly, as well as seeing this use of a supernatural existential as thus unnecessary, Balthasar is concerned that the application of an existential that is supernatural in this context introduces something *supernatural* into the *nature* of man. This creates a confusion between what is natural and universally possessed and what is distinctively supernatural, issuing in the very real danger that the work of grace is pre-empted in human transcendence. Specifically he is concerned about the tendency in some usages of the supernatural existential to equate man's supernaturally elevated transcendence with an actual experience of grace (which after all can be lost), and to understand it as a personal address from the personal God. It is even perceived to provide a formal, non-

⁵⁸Ibid. 254

⁵⁹ cf chapter 4 section D. For further discussion of this controversial question cf Lucas Lamadrid: "Anonymous or Analogous Christians? Rahner and von Balthasar on Naming the Non-Christian" *Modern Theology* 11 July 1995 363-384 (here 369-371); Marc Ouellet: "Paradox and/or Supernatural Existential" in *Communio* 18 Summer 1991 259-279; Eamonn Conway: *The Anonymous Christian – a Relativised Christianity?* (Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, 1993); Dalzell: *Dramatic* 25-33; G O'Hanlon "The Jesuits and Modern Theology - Rahner, von Balthasar and Liberation Theology" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 58 1992 25-45.

⁶⁰ Th III 416; IV 142 cf HDL 70-71

objective knowledge of revelation which, on the basis that God wills to reveal himself uniquely and definitively in Christ, is understood to have a specifically Christian character: that is, an implicit knowledge of the incarnation and the Trinity.⁶¹ Balthasar finds no support in Scripture⁶² for the implication of such a universal a priori implantation of grace, verbal revelation and salvation history transcendentally in the given constitution of man and concludes that there is “an irreconcilable contradiction” in this perspective because objective religion will necessarily fail in attempts to objectify the a priori, transcendental experience since it cannot be guaranteed by special, a posteriori, categorial revelation.⁶³ Crucially this kind of transcendental perspective obliterates the dramatic tension inherent in the nature of man, who bears the mark of his decisive ordering to God in his very creatureliness (as an image by definition in search of its prototype) yet is entirely dependent on the free revelation of God to be conscious of the direction and nature of the fulfilment he searches for and to have that yearning satisfied.⁶⁴

Balthasar sets out his concerns for an authentic expression of the God-creature relationship in salvation history in theo-dramatic terms.⁶⁵ The Christian solution to the problem of the meaning of man and his history should not be anticipated (*antizipieren*) or constructed from man’s resources or seen as “‘diffusely omnipresent’ (by a ‘transcendental’ generalising tendency and by talking in terms of a ‘supernatural *existentiale*’”).⁶⁶ This stops due weight being given to the dramatic tension of man’s

⁶¹ cf Th III 410-417; 456-457; IV 75, 78, 143 He locates these tendencies in some of the writings of Karl Rahner, L Heislbetz, and M Schmaus cf Th III 411-412 especially notes 17-27, his concerns of course also being reflected in his famous rejection of Rahner’s term ‘anonymous Christian’ cf especially *The Moment of Christian Witness* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1994); also *Engagement* especially 17-22. (cf Eamon Conway: *Anonymous* and Lamadrid: “Anonymous”). By the time he wrote his book on de Lubac (published 1976) Balthasar is also explicit about de Lubac’s rejection of Rahner’s supernatural existential in the same context. HDL 71

⁶² Th III 411, 414-415

⁶³ Ibid. 413-414

⁶⁴ cf Ibid. 415-417; For a penetrating and comprehensive analysis of the difference between the dramatic and the transcendental perspective cf Marc Oullet: “Paradox and/or Supernatural Existential” *Communio* 18 (Summer 1991) 259-279

⁶⁵ Th IV 75ff cf I 345-50

⁶⁶ Th IV 75 Man has not ‘always been aware’ of redemption, even if only through his own transcendence. The divine response is not “something that was ‘always there’.” 76, cf also 143, 150

historical situation in the world - continually searching for the answer, but totally incapable of constructing it (even in anticipatory fashion) or deducing its point of emergence. Balthasar consistently and clearly holds on to the importance of grasping “the ultimately hopeless situation of finite existence in the face of a transcendence that does not automatically disclose itself”,⁶⁷ of being in a situation in which God’s free triune self-revelation (which is the sole answer of human yearning) is awaited or unknown. Man cannot fit together the fragments of meaning he may perceive because God in his freedom has reserved to Himself the gift of the synthesis.⁶⁸ Whilst Balthasar holds fast then to his focus on the concrete world order made with the one supernatural end in view, the fulfilment of that end cannot be deduced from below: man has not even an intimation (*erahnen*) of the solution.⁶⁹

It is in the interests of this dramatic tension inherent, in Balthasar’s view, to an authentic articulation of the dynamics of salvation, that Balthasar insists that *before* we consider the divine response the world of space and time must be allowed to manifest itself *as it is*, in all its finitude, its pathos, and its sinful brokenness⁷⁰—free from any premature introduction of the divine response.

Thus in contrast to a description of salvation conveying the cohesion between human transcendence towards its divine answer and the giving of that answer (where the modulation from transcendence to fulfilment is, if you like, played *legato*), for Balthasar this coming together is less smooth. It embraces a variety of movement amongst the characters (towards and away from each other and back again), changes of place and direction, confrontation, rejection, conversion. Salvation consists in God’s *turning* to a world which is *lost*, an actual *intervention* unimagined and previously unknown, coming into a world emphatically incapable of working out the answer and led way off the mark

⁶⁷ Ibid. 75

⁶⁸ Ibid. 77

⁶⁹ Ibid. 75 The inadequacy of man’s solutions (and hence of the inappropriateness of reading them as “valid ciphers of redemption”) is finally shown in the face of the actual redemption given by God in Christ. Ibid. 78

⁷⁰ The inability to anticipate fulfilment belongs to creaturely finitude per se but is particularly marked in the fallen state. Ibid. 78

by sin—and yet constituting exactly the answer that is yearned for. Whilst God’s action in Christ has an inward affect on all human beings by virtue of their solidarity in a single human history, the personal commitment to Christ of dying and rising with him that characterises Christian discipleship is decisively distinct.⁷¹

The status of a natural intimation and pre-Christian awareness of the Christian answer is not entirely negative. Drama itself offers a kind of *Vorgriff* (*Vorverständnis*); so do the insights of inter-subjectivity, as we shall see in the next chapter, but always in terms of *analogy* rather than anticipation, conscious of the *maior dissimilitudo*.⁷² “Action”, Balthasar says as he explores the resources of stage drama, “is the run-up to a future that is not predestined, but is indicated in various ways.”⁷³ The locus of ‘anticipations’ of the Christian solution is the Old Testament ‘preparation’ of the Word of God with a view to his incarnation. There is a ‘pre-Christian twilight’, but this (in so far as it *is* light) is for Balthasar a ‘preliminary’ (“*Vorlauf*”), or rather a reflection (“*Rückstrahl*”- literally, ‘backbeaming’) of *Christ*. Thus any ‘anticipatory’ ‘light’ is specifically tied to the *light of Christ*; it belongs to that one light not yet fully revealed. For Balthasar then there is a tension to be maintained between the pre-Christian and the Christian which does not ossify into a rigid dialectic of law and Gospel in which all those aspects of the old covenant that constitute types of the new are deprived of all inner truth, but nor is it so relaxed as to attribute to the old covenant an anticipatory share in the new, such that some pre-Christian truth extracted from “the type’s external husk” could be simply equated with the Christian and post-Christian truth.⁷⁴ Any understanding then of the Christ event as a *crescendo* of God’s involvement in the world is simply dependent on the fact that the incarnation is the *single* point upon which God’s saving involvement rests, everything converging on or emerging from it, and is not because it is the “unsurpassable highpoint” in a *range* of saving initiatives.⁷⁵

⁷¹ cf eg Th I 30f

⁷² Ibid. 17-19 (drama); *Moment* 147 (intersubjectivity)

⁷³ Th I 347

⁷⁴ Th IV 207

⁷⁵ Ibid. 207-208; I 30

Now, with both this rejection of an ‘undramatic’ transcendental understanding of history and his rejection of Barthian constriction in mind, we can approach Balthasar’s theo-dramatic treatment of inclusion in Christ according to the reciprocal inter-penetration of the principle of Adam and the principle of Christ.

C Inclusion in Christ

In accordance with the christocentrism outlined in the previous chapter the *Theo-drama* makes it clear that a full doctrine of man is only possible within christology. Here we will consider how the emphasis on ‘inclusion in Christ’⁷⁶ sheds light on the relation between man’s nature and end in an understanding of the relationship between the first and the second Adam according to which the Christ principle embraces the Adam principle.

The central thought can be found in its essentials in *Karl Barth* :

The first Adam *is* first, and the second Adam *is* second. But on a deeper level this true and lasting priority is grounded in another priority: the first Adam has been mysteriously grounded in and has been created in the first place for the sake of the second Adam. And he cannot deny the traces in himself of this bond between them.⁷⁷

This is developed substantially in the *Theo-drama*. The fact that man is only really understood in the light of Christ, is because “theologically speaking, the first Adam is created for the sake of, and with a view to, the second, even if he appears first in chronological time (I Cor 15: 45).”⁷⁸ This twofold pattern is key to his understanding of the relationship between nature and grace. For having moved away from a *focus* on abstract concepts like natural and supernatural or nature and grace, Balthasar now explores the same under the concrete and more personal categories of man and Christ. Chronologically, Adam comes first and Christ comes after him, but theologically in the plan of God the Christ principle is the former, the one in, through, for whom and with a view to whom Adam is created. There is a very real temporal sequence in history which

⁷⁶For Guardini’s influence cf KB 330

⁷⁷ Ibid. 353

⁷⁸ Th II 373-4

moves from the beginning towards the end, from Adam to Christ at the fullness of time, but Christ embraces the beginning and the end. He is the alpha and omega.

If we examine this in more detail we find that in the first place “mankind as a whole, and each individual within it, represents a biological unity that cannot be designated in advance as the unity of Christ.”⁷⁹ Following Paul’s emphasis in I Cor 15: 45ff man is initially polarised by the principle of unity that he calls “the first man, Adam” and it is only subsequently that this polarisation is reversed by Christ who is the second not the first man/Adam.⁸⁰ The implications for the natural-supernatural relation in us are clear. The movement in time of first to second Adam is also our movement, from being the image of Adam, having all the natural constituents that belong to being a human creature, to being configured to the image of Christ, made a new creation and heir to the kingdom of heaven (I Cor 15.49).

But this outlook needs to be seen in accordance with another perspective. For, although Balthasar maintains that according to this first view it could be possible to call Adam the Alpha and Christ the Omega, man’s destiny lying in the transition from first to second principle, this is in fact rejected by a second view

equally Pauline and explicitly formulated in the Johannine writings, to the effect that there is “one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (I Cor 8:6); “For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth” (Col 1:16), so that he is “the first and the last” (Rev 1:17; 2:8), “Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” (Rev 22:13).⁸¹

In this perspective of creation in Christ “the second principle embraces and includes the first; the first comes to rest in the second, although, according to the foregoing view, the second takes over from the first.”⁸²

This implies two things as regards the Adam-principle that clearly build upon the differentiation of Balthasar’s approach from one of developmental continuity between man and his wholeness. Firstly the Adam principle, because historically prior, “cannot be aware that it is a step on the way to the Christ-principle”, although he may have some sense of transcending towards something greater and fulfilling and thus a feeling of

⁷⁹ Th III 33

⁸⁰ Ibid. 33, 15

⁸¹ Ibid. 34

his own inchoateness. His intuition then is not so much an intuition of his goal and completion as of his incompleteness. This is supported by the second implication, that is Adam's uncertainty about his origins. He is created and "cannot uncover his own foundations; ultimately he is not self-subsisting and cannot be utterly secure in himself."⁸³ This sense of provisionality cannot be silenced although (on the very real basis of his being a spiritual being equipped with power, insight and will as well as dependency on the other) he may try to develop his autonomy in the direction of self-completion. Such efforts (characteristic of the race of Adam) resist what is in fact necessary for completion, that is "being uprooted (according to the first principle) and replanted (according to the second)".⁸⁴

These images of uprooting and replanting suggest radical discontinuity between the two principles, a discontinuity underlined by the fact that it is *characteristic* of Adam's striving that he resists this movement, striving against the principle of his fulfilment. Now this resistance must be characteristic of man as a *sinner*, for such attempts to take root in himself are in fact contrary to the nature of the Adam-principle, because Christ is himself its inner principle. The Adam principle was from the very beginning "conceived and created as something inchoate and transitional" that can only be fulfilled outside of itself in the "other", who is in fact its goal and ground.⁸⁵

However this raises questions regarding whether by 'Adam' Balthasar means fallen man or natural man, as God created him. Whilst Balthasar is not very specific about this, his preoccupation with the concrete situation in which we know man means that he is dealing with man in the fallen condition we know. Nevertheless this concrete situation still includes the fundamental characteristics with which man was endowed in creation, albeit damaged. In other words, the term Adam means both our natural finite state and our fallen state, because this is what constitutes our concrete state.⁸⁶ Thus we

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 35

⁸⁶ cf "Ethics" 77; cf also chapter 6 section A2 below

could say (as Balthasar does regarding Christ's role as *concretissimum*) that this scheme of Adam and Christ applies both prescinding from the concrete modality of our fallen state *and* in the modality of our fallen condition. However, we will raise this topic again in the conclusion to this chapter, because a failure for 'Adam' to refer to that 'very good' form of life created by God in the beginning would greatly reduce the effectiveness of this schema as a response, corrective and development of Barth's position. Further concerns about the relationship between fallenness and finitude in Balthasar's understanding of nature will emerge further into our study.

So the fact that man is not his own answer but is a puzzle that can only find completion in the "other", in God from whom he comes and to whom he is going, is now set in the specifically christological framework in which Christ is and always has been the beginning and end, both the goal and the ground of the Adam principle. Christ's coming in the fulness of time after Adam for Adam's salvation is to do with his place before Adam—as the mediator of creation and in his predestination as the one in whom we are chosen before the foundation of the world, even in his begetting from the Father, as we described in the previous chapter. From the very beginning he is meant as Adam's fulfilment. It is in this context that in Parts II and III of the thesis we will consider all the various aspects of Balthasar's discussion of the human vocation and its fulfilment: freedom, image, idea, person.

Despite this emphasis on the fundamental orientation of the first principle to the second (nature being made for grace), in keeping with what we have just said about the dramatic character of Balthasar's perspective, it still holds true that "the second principle cannot be envisaged from the first, not even as a postulate that is inconceivable and yet indispensable to fulfilment, for through it—and the implications are overwhelming—we actually 'become partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter I:4)."⁸⁷ This is because what is given through the second principle is beyond the wildest dreams of the finite creature—the infinitely gratuitous gift of partaking of the divine nature.

This is where the distinction between nature and grace really matters to von Balthasar. Even though the Christ principle embraces the Adam, and the latter has always been made for the former, there is no direct continuity between nature and grace. The grace of fulfilment in Christ opens up a totally new dimension; and the transition from Adam to Christ principle is a striking, unanticipated event.

The distinctive advantage of this perspective is that in it both things are clear: the Christ principle embraces but does not swallow up the Adam principle and the Adam principle is made for but does not absorb the Christ principle in some kind of anticipation. We only know of Christ's Alpha behind the Alpha of Adam (I Peter I:20) from the outlook of the end. The fact, "eternally present and true in God", that he has created all things from before all time with a view to and *in* Christ "is only in the process of coming-to-be in creation."⁸⁸ Christ, Balthasar says, is both "determined from below by the whole world drama and on the other hand he is *not* determined by it since he alone is 'from above' (Jn 8:23)", "lowered to earth by God's free action" as "the capstone of the entire vault of creation built up 'from below.'" The sending from above embraces the determination from below because "everything he synthesises in himself was created in the first place with a view to this synthesis." From the perspective of Adam to Christ principle "he is caused by the world and its history"; and from the perspective of the Christ principle embracing the Adam principle "the world and its history are caused by him." Under the first he is the world's Omega; under the second its Alpha. The drama of the world takes place between these two. In Christ they are identical.⁸⁹

This strange "reciprocal causality" which apparently operates in his concrete person thus provides us with a concrete and dramatic delineation of what Balthasar was trying to say about the nature-grace relationship in *Karl Barth*. The natural is indeed 'first'—the presupposition of grace, that which is there to be fulfilled in the grace that

⁸⁷ Th III 35

⁸⁸ Ibid. 37

⁸⁹ Th III 15; IV 29, 44, 66-67

comes after (in the end that is Christ), although, on the other hand, this nature exists for the sake of fulfilment in grace. The divine intention that brings it into existence is that it be completed in Christ, and so the first is contained within the latter, embraced in the one plan of God in Christ. In Balthasar's theology both have to be held together, the former within, but not lost in, the latter. Whilst later we may find Balthasar is less clear in the significance given the Adam principle, here he goes as far as to say that there is "a kind of *circumincessio* between the first and second Adam, between the order of creation and the order of grace and redemption"; the movement being "most definitely from the first to the second", but the first not understood as a mere "obsolescent 'means' leading to the second."⁹⁰ The transition to the Christ principle is not the creation of a new human being. In the incarnation it is the nature of the old Adam which is taken up (especially on the cross) and thus "through the drama of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus carried over into the state of the new Adam".⁹¹ It is a more detailed understanding of this movement that concerns us in the remaining part of this study.

D Summary and initial assessment

In this chapter we have seen that Balthasar's christocentric perspective is a dramatic one that seeks to avoid both Barthian constriction on the one hand and any kind of transcendental anticipation on the other. Christ is thus the beginning and end of history, as it comes from and goes back to God, but without stifling the horizontal aspect of historical development which is included in God's will for the world in Christ. There is a "reciprocal causality" between the two operating in Christ, such that there is a genuine movement from Adam to Christ in which Christ seems to be caused by the world and its history, but, from the perspective of eternity, is still in the process of coming to be in the world. *Christ is the beginning behind the beginning of Adam*, since before the foundation of the world he is the one in, through and for whom everything is

⁹⁰ Th III 39

⁹¹ The cross's centrality is based on the fact that "all the aspects and consequences of the old nature " are "resolutely adopted and suffered." Th III 37; V 506; cf chapter 6 section D2 below.

made, thus establishing him as the cause and the goal of the world and its history. There is a “*circumincessio*” between the first and the second Adam, between the orders of creation and of grace.

As we come to the end of Part I of this thesis, we can see that Balthasar has made a major contribution to the movement in twentieth-century Catholic theology concerned to emphasise a concrete christocentric focus in the wake of the over-conceptualisation of neo-scholastic theology. He has thus also contributed to ecumenical dialogue particularly through his engagement with Karl Barth. What we have outlined gives some indication of how thoroughly and systematically he shows that it is in all Christ is and does that creaturely fulfilment is brought about in accordance with God’s very plan in creation. No aspect goes untouched by this perspective and thus Balthasar shows himself to be consistent with his christocentric presuppositions, even if the detail of the christology that underpins them could be more thoroughly expounded. By choosing dramatic categories in particular he has found the tools that effectively express the particular historical Christ-centred perspective he had already delineated, and, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, drawn the various insights of his perspective into a more orchestrated whole. Moreover the dramatic way forward intends to avoid from the start the dangers that Balthasar detects in other alternatives to dry essentialism, as well as eschewing the constrictive tendency that he perceived in Barth—despite emphatically sharing with him the fundamental presuppositions of his christocentrism.

The question is whether Balthasar’s perspective is able to hold so many divergent concerns together. In a theologian so concerned never to soften the paradoxes of Christian doctrine and so determined never to create a theological or philosophical system, this is difficult to answer definitively. However, we can consider a number of points raised by the description so far.

1 No 'Christological constriction'?

Having moved away from the bottom up approach of scholastic dualism, in maintaining his new approach Balthasar eschews two extremes: the 'absorption' of the order of grace in the order of creation, and the 'swallowing up' of the order of creation in the priority of the order of grace and redemption. In the end both tendencies fail to maintain an authentic distinction between nature and grace and therefore in theo-dramatic terms jeopardise the dramatic quality of the God-man relationship.⁹² How successful is Balthasar in maintaining a *via media*?

Regarding the first danger, the absorption of grace in the order of creation, Balthasar rejects any talk of strict continuity between the two. His accentuation of the union of nature and grace in the concrete by no means endorses the identification of creation and revelation found in German idealism, but corrects the superficial dualism that followed it.⁹³ He clearly maintains that "to speak of continuity between the orders is in fact highly misleading and, sooner or later, involves making grace (even as *medicinalis*) an epiphenomenon of nature".⁹⁴ This position, it is true, is perhaps less than clear when he likens the relationship between man's nature and its supernatural end to that of seed and flower⁹⁵ (although this comparison does specifically refer to the *ordering* of nature to its end and not to the actual unfolding of that vocation), and in the *Theo-drama* the use of the term *circumincessio* (usually used to describe the indwelling of the persons of the Trinity one with another) to express the interpenetration of the two orders certainly suggests an extraordinary degree of unity between the two, even if not explicitly implying *continuity*. Nevertheless the main position is very much reflected in the theo-

⁹² This problem reflects and is illuminated by the perhaps more familiar question of 'christology from above' and/or 'from below'. Just as the 'below approach' in christology, which seems suited to communicate with contemporary man, is in danger of deducing christology from anthropology and in the last analysis dissolving christology into anthropology, the below approach from nature to grace starting with the structures of human consciousness and the conditions for the possibility of the incarnation is in danger of dissolving grace into nature. Yet it is not possible to approach either Christology or the nature-grace relationship from above without some recourse to anthropological categories. (cf Kasper: "The Theological Anthropology of Gaudium et Spes" *Communio* 23 Spring 1996 136)

⁹³ ET I 47

⁹⁴ Ibid. 60

dramatic rejection of undramatic anticipation of the christological ‘answer’ to the question of man’s nature.

Similarly the two Adams model of the *Theo-drama* also preserves the distinctiveness of grace vis-à-vis the creature made for it because the Adam principle has no awareness of the fact that it is “a step on the way to the Christ principle” (despite a sense of self-transcendence).⁹⁶ It is only aware of its inchoateness and provisionality. Thus, as we have seen, even though made for the Christ principle, the Adam principle cannot ‘absorb’ it in some kind of anticipation, for there is no strict continuity between the two, rather the first principle needs ‘uprooting’ and ‘replanting’ according to the second.

As creation takes place in Christ, Balthasar does maintain that there is an identifiable relatedness of the individual in the world to Christ. But this ‘natural relation’, (found specifically, as we shall see in the next chapter, in the incarnational and trinitarian implications uncovered in the structure in which the ‘I’ freely grasps itself), avoids the notion of “a universal offer to all men of a grace that is formally and materially christological”, and the implication that this gives “a distinctive inner quality to the being and actions of all men”.⁹⁷ On the contrary Balthasar is unmistakably committed to emphasising the distinctiveness of both the incarnation and of the decision to be a follower of Christ. The former has the impact of a meteor on human history—“man will never again be what he was before Christ”⁹⁸—and the latter is as radical as martyrdom⁹⁹ and therefore also involves the full commitment of man’s freedom to say yes or no to the grace of Christ.¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, how successfully does Balthasar himself avoid the other extreme, a constrictive christocentrism in danger of denying, ignoring or ‘incapacitating’, the state,

⁹⁵ Ibid. 178

⁹⁶ Th III 34

⁹⁷ Ibid. 457

⁹⁸ Ibid. 25

⁹⁹ cf *Moment*. Regarding the contrast with Rahner cf note 59 above and Philip Endean: “Von Balthasar, Rahner, and the Commissar” in *New Blackfriars* 79 Jan 1998 33-38.

¹⁰⁰ cf chapter 5 section D3.

constitution and capacities of man as created by God in the beginning? Is he at risk of overlooking the significance of the first man, Adam, and his history? If man is to be understood in Christ, then does he make any sense in himself, independently of the incarnation? Is his simple createdness comprehensible? Has the integrity of human-nature, its rationality and freedom been jettisoned?

Just as Balthasar set out to uphold the significance of nature in *Karl Barth*, now, in the more concrete categories of the *Theo-drama*, he also desires to give full attention to man's natural constitution. In fact starting here becomes part of his method. Accordingly, the volume 'Man in God' precedes that entitled 'Persons in Christ', and in the next chapter we will see how in this former volume he gives substantial space to analysing the significance of man's freedom. Denying man's natural power to transcend himself and the world would constitute "a want of gratitude to the Creator".¹⁰¹ Man and his natural capacities have a real and enduring significance: they are what God truly *began* in the order of creation with a view to perfection in the order of Christ's redemption; an *enduring initial stage* established by him without which the final perfection is meaningless. There is no recapitulation in Christ without there being an 'un-recapitulated' creation and without its process of becoming. If God's purpose is to unite all created things in Christ (Eph I:3ff) not only must we see things in the light of this destiny, there must also be acknowledgement of and acquaintance with this 'all' which he synthesises in himself. It is a genuine contributor to this synthesis, as it is truly the nature of the first man that becomes his own.¹⁰² Thus, even if the goal of fulfilment in the grace of Christ is the first thing intended by the agent (and we have seen the importance of keeping this goal in mind in Balthasar's perspective) "in *ordine executionis* we must first posit a natural (non-divine) subject as the possible recipient of grace."¹⁰³ It is therefore not entirely accurate to see Balthasar's approach as one strictly

¹⁰¹ ET I 161 (It would be "equally lacking in gratitude to the Redeemer and giver of grace not to see in grace something wholly new and other, crowning and perfecting man's attempts, precisely because it first shatters and overturns them.")

¹⁰² Th III 40

¹⁰³ Ibid. 257

and exclusively from above. For the natural preliminary stages retain their significance, in “the full brilliance of the light of revelation”, as they did for Christ himself.¹⁰⁴

However the significance of Adam and his natural capacities is strictly this: an *incomplete beginning*, not self-contained or sufficient, nor able to reach beyond itself.¹⁰⁵ Because man with his natural searching for God is made for the sake of grace, the former is in some way the condition of the latter; but in the Creator’s design it cannot be understood apart from the latter, “which is its justification and the solution of its riddles”.¹⁰⁶ The incapacity for self-fulfilment does not render man’s creaturely constitution and capacities insignificant: rather Balthasar interprets this inchoateness positively as *receptivity*, a natural predisposition for grace which constitutes not a platonist longing including within it a latent claim, nor a resigned indifference to what is to come on the basis of the unforeseeability of the divine plan, but an “*active readiness...for every possible initiative on the part of God’s will without at the same time anticipating it.*”¹⁰⁷ It is this receptivity, this active readiness that becomes for Balthasar the dominating expression of the authentic essence of creatureliness and is one that finds fulfilment precisely by being taken up and perfected by Christ. It is in Christ alone that we find the synthesis of the opposite movements of nature upwards to God and grace downwards to man. This, as we have seen, gives us our new theological starting point, starting not from below with the natural ascent and then working up to grace, but nor invalidating this natural ascent, rather understanding its incorporation and completion *within the setting of faith*, where reason becomes serviceable.¹⁰⁸ The brilliance of Balthasar’s use of the two Adams model is precisely that he can focus attention on the second Adam, Christ, but in so doing in no way obscure the first Adam, because Christ has truly adopted the first Adam and so there is no danger of failing to find the first in the second. In this way Balthasar shows how his positive inclusion of the order of

¹⁰⁴ cf “Ethics” 77

¹⁰⁵ cf ET I 60; cf note 54 above

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 1 62

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 60 my italics

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 177-179

creation in its own right is not a footnote to his christocentric perspective, but is *part* of his christocentrism. Creation is Christ-centred not simply because it is ordained for perfection in Christ but because he is its ground, creation is in Christ. The christocentric perspective on creation is not to do with some prior reality of grace or redemption¹⁰⁹ but to do with the person and mission of the Son who is the mediator of creation as well as the one in whom it is recapitulated.

However this rehabilitation of the significance of nature in a christocentric perspective is dependent upon a positive understanding of the first Adam, not simply as a sin-ridden principle in need of redemption, of uprooting and replanting, but also as a provisional, initial stage in need of completion. Whilst in a lengthy passage of Przywara's concerning the two Adams cited in *Karl Barth* there is no sense of a positive transition, but a sharp dialectic between "original sin in Adam and redemption in Christ",¹¹⁰ in his description in the *Theo-drama* Balthasar is less specific about whether the Adam principle refers to pre- or post-fall.¹¹¹ Adam is thus both that 'good' creation of God established in (not yet perfected) relation with him from the beginning *and* that same creation in sinful alienation from this original closeness. Balthasar's description makes it clear that he is not just referring to a corrupt principle in need of total overhaul, but also to an inchoate principle in need of fulfilment, suggesting that christocentrism does not mean just the rejection and overturning of the first Adam: if it is to be truly Christ-centred, it will involve a recognition of this 'made through and for and in the image of Christ' initial stage, taken up and fulfilled by the second, who is both Beginning and End.

Nevertheless Balthasar's tendency to avoid treating the initial created state and the fallen state of human nature separately does create some confusion between finitude and sin as we shall discuss later. Moreover he is not entirely consistent in his

¹⁰⁹ Th III 157

¹¹⁰ From Przywara's short article in *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 1949 1-9 quoted in KB 256

¹¹¹ This is because Balthasar does not think in terms of separating the redemptive aspect of Christ's work from that of bringing man to a greater fulfilment than that known to the first human beings prior to the fall. cf chapter 2 section A above.

acknowledgement of the significance of the first Adam. In *Theo-drama* V he actually denies any solidarity between all mortals and the first Adam: such solidarity only comes with the death of the second Adam and “the first Adam shrinks to the level of a kind of prelude to the second Adam.”¹¹² Similarly we will find the first Adam has little significance in his theological anthropology discussed in chapter six of this thesis.

Lastly it is very important to the *Theo-drama* that the relative significance that Balthasar in the main continues to give our natural constitution includes our *becoming*. The fact that we are created in and with a view to Christ is only known to us from the perspective of the end and is still coming to be in the order of creation. This process of becoming cannot be constricted or overtaken. The predestination of all things is not a constrictive determination; indeed there is a sense in which Christ is caused and determined by the world and its history as well as being its cause and determination.¹¹³

This is central to the theo-dramatics because the drama of our salvation is precisely this, a *drama* and not something known with certainty in advance. The paradoxical sense that the success of God’s design for the world is guaranteed in the Son, but that there is no certain anticipation of a “happy ending”, is drawn together in the mission of the Son, who in the book of Revelation is the Conqueror and King of Kings but is also still making war in a robe dripped in blood.¹¹⁴ Both God and man “must be allowed scope to act in this way or that.”¹¹⁵ The final perspective of the whole does not mean that the actor is compelled to act one way or another. His freedom must not be determined in advance. The fact that everything is “in Jesus Christ” does not mean “the game has been rigged”¹¹⁶ but rather “gives us, a priori, the greatest opportunity and the widest possible framework for the interplay of both forms of freedom”, human and divine.¹¹⁷ This is Christ’s role as stage and as the person from whom all the roles of the

¹¹²Th V 343, cf also 392. This contrasts with the acknowledgement of human solidarity on the basis of common origin in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 360.

¹¹³ Th III 15; H especially 51-65

¹¹⁴ Th III 254; cf also I 20; IV 15ff, 21, 40-41, 54

¹¹⁵ Th III 14

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 18, also 22; IV 11; I 470 (Shakespeare)

¹¹⁷ Th III 17; cf 52

characters who are to play on the stage are allotted (to be discussed in part III). It is thus that he is the condition of the possibility even of “nasty” free action, like the fall. This freedom for creaturely action does not mean that the facts of God’s plan can be altered—fulfilment is always in Jesus Christ—but it does mean that man can choose to follow his own plan of self-completion if he wishes (which in the end means a rejection of fulfilment ending in slavery.)

Here we have obviously entered the area of freedom and its relationship to grace—the focus of the next part of the thesis.

2 Intra-trinitarian constriction?

There are aspects of Balthasar’s christocentric stage which do not always seem quite as open and free as the above description suggests.¹¹⁸ We must leave a fuller assessment until we have set out his description of human freedom and its fulfilment in the next chapter. However, in the *intra-trinitarian* perspective we have already outlined (in which the God-creature distance is grounded in the God-God ‘distance’ of Father and Son and man is created and also begotten in grace along with the eternal Son¹¹⁹) the relation between eternal begetting, creation and adoption appears so closely tied and our creation and fulfilment are thus seen so very much within the trinitarian ‘event’, that this perspective may seem just as (if not more) constrictive than the other forms of constriction I have suggested that he has avoided. This is exacerbated by the extent to which his non-scotist eternal predestination of the Son seems to imply that our predestined creation and adoption in him is a constrictive predestination of redemption from sin—as the redemptive mission is intrinsic to the predestination of the incarnation.¹²⁰ Whilst Balthasar explicitly rejects “any ‘christological constriction’ that would ground the reality of creation on some ‘prior’ reality of redemption or grace” and

¹¹⁸ Dalzell also refers to christological constriction in Balthasar, but means a concentration on the activity of Christ at the expense of the Spirit. *Dramatic* 277-285

¹¹⁹ Th III 35; cf also chapter 5 below.

¹²⁰ cf chapter 2 section A above and chapter 6 sections C3 and D2 below.

comments on Barth's universalist tendencies accordingly, in his book on the latter he quoted amongst the words of his pro-christocentric colleagues these of Josef Bernhart:

Atonement, Christ's work of reconciliation, is, as it were, the a priori of the created world, the sign under which all else is explained.¹²¹

No correction or modification was made. In his *Theology of History* he can offer the cross as the condition for the possibility of existence and predestination.¹²² The deeper we delve into the relationship between the doctrines of the Trinity and those of christology and soteriology in the *Theo-drama* the more this kind of perspective on human predestination in the predestination of the Son appears typical—suggesting a christocentrism that is perhaps more of a 'system' than an 'ethos' after all. As, so far, we have only considered the relation between begetting and creation and have yet to look specifically at that between begetting and adoption, we can of course only introduce these possibilities here.

¹²¹ Bernhart: *Chaos und Dämonie* (Munich: Kösel, 1950) 95 cited by Balthasar in KB 356

¹²² H 66

PART II

**THEO-DRAMA: THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FINITE
AND INFINITE FREEDOM**

Chapter 4

The structure of finite freedom

One can then continue with a *Dramatik*, since this God enters into alliance with us: How does the absolute liberty of God in Jesus Christ confront the relative but true liberty of man?¹

Here we have man, both singular and plural, thrown onto the stage, endowed with freedom, condemned to freedom and given grace to exercise it, with the power of becoming what he can on the basis of his own nature and constitution and yet unable to do this outside the divine freedom but only in it and with it. How sublime and yet how needy man is!²

A Introduction

Freedom is of the very essence of love.³

Balthasar's determination to avoid an extrinsic understanding of the relationship between nature and grace is clear from the findings of the previous two chapters. However it has also become apparent that he rejects too what we might call an 'immanentism' which indeed recognises the *innerworking* of grace in nature as he does, but without fully doing justice to its *inbreaking*. The character of grace as the unique *gift* coming to man from without of himself, as the 'surprise' exceeding all expectation, is no longer entirely clear, but it is somehow already 'apprehended' in his own self-understanding.

Balthasar's rejection of extrinsicism is final. However, whilst the task of overcoming the extrinsicism of a decadent neo-scholasticism is a preoccupation in his earlier writings, as Catholic theology takes these concerns on board, we find that by the mid nineteen-sixties Balthasar is concerned that the renewed appreciation of the

¹ Balthasar: *My Work in Retrospect* 117

² Th II 195-196

³ Th V 99

interrelationship of nature and grace, theology and philosophy, Church and world that he fought for was now tending towards a failure to focus on the distinctive uniqueness of Christian grace. In addressing this concern in *Love Alone the Way of Revelation*⁴ Balthasar recognises that extrinsicism and immanentism are not the only alternatives.⁵ The way he adopts can be called the way of *love*. For love (whether in personal encounter or in appreciation of a work of art)⁶ can never be deduced from or controlled by the one experiencing it but requires the complete freedom of the other's self-disclosure and also invites response in an interior manner by awakening love within. Thus models of love encounter (in the personal or aesthetic sphere) can provide a pointer "suggesting a direction in which to look for the specifically Christian",⁷ that is the manifestation of the absolute love of God (as the meaning of our existence) in the unexpected form of a fellow man⁸ and his agonising death on the Cross⁹ and our liberation and 'love-awakening' in the trinitarian life of love. This kind of approach developed initially in relation to his theo-aesthetics, also bears fruit in his description of the encounter of free persons in the *Theo-drama*, the drama of salvation.

⁴ *Love Alone the Way of Revelation* (LA) (Burns and Oates 1968); cf also *Engagement with God* (SPCK, London 1975)

⁵ In the patristic period there was no problem in using cosmology (and anthropology) as a point of reference (eg presenting Christianity "as the fulfilment of a fragmented understanding of the universe" as well as a conversion that leaves behind any tendency to absolutise these fragments (LA 11)), because the inextricable inter-relationship of philosophy and theology, natural and supernatural was taken for granted. However from the Renaissance onwards the natural began to be seen as an independent sphere such that rather than providing a verification for the truths of Christianity, what had been a cosmological background now "absorbed the whole of Christianity into itself" (Leibniz LA 21). This is why the later distinction between nature and grace was justified, but it has tended to evolve into contrary extremes such as the sharp drawing of the frontiers in neo-scholastic extrinsicism on the one hand or the kind of immanentism found in modernism and all forms of 'anthropological reduction' where ultimately Christianity is reduced "to transcendental presuppositions of a man's self understanding". (LA 43)

⁶ In the aesthetic sphere the overpowering experience of startling beauty unveils a phenomenon in its uniqueness, as it truly is, and not controlled by, deduced or explained from the person having the experience. In the love of personal relations the 'I' encounters "the other *as* the other in all his freedom", and the other cannot be dominated or the love of the encounter deduced before hand. (LA 45)

⁷ LA 45; cf also eg *Man in History A Theological Study* (Sheed and Ward, London 1968) 188-9.

⁸ LA 60

⁹ eg Ibid. 117

1 Freedom and love

It is in the context of this insight of *Love Alone*—that love always comes from outside because it can only exist between persons, it always involves free self-disclosure, free self-giving between the I and the thou—that I want to turn now exclusively to the *Theo-drama*. I will introduce Balthasar’s focus on finite freedom in volume II and its relation to infinite freedom in which perspective we will find mature expression of the nature-grace relationship in man as created by God and as it is to be perfected in him, and also enter the realm traditionally considered under the concepts of grace and freedom. In understanding the fulfilment of the human vocation as the love of God coming within from without, the freedom of the one and the other is important, particularly when we consider the communion of love the creature has with God where this relation of freedoms abides, however intimate the indwelling. Indeed, increasing participation means an increase, not a diminishing in the creature’s freedom, so the relationship is guaranteed ever-increasing dramatic vitality.

In 1963 in *Love Alone* Balthasar wrote “Only a philosophy of freedom and love can ever justify our existence.”¹⁰ We could say that it is such a philosophy of freedom and love which he uses later in the *Theo-drama*. Balthasar himself states that in contrast to the first part of the trilogy, *The Glory of the Lord*, where he was primarily concerned ‘with the manifestation of God’s glory and only subsequently with man’,¹¹ in the *Theo-drama* the interplay of infinite and finite freedom is his topic right from the start.¹² It is central to the concerns of the second part of the Trilogy for “everything ‘good’ stands and falls with freedom.”¹³ Indeed freedom is the very presupposition of there being a drama at all.¹⁴ This theo-dramatic preoccupation is the culmination of a focus central to his theological project. It corrects the classical exaggeration of the spiritual and universal

¹⁰ Ibid. 115-116

¹¹ Th IV 211

¹² Ibid. In the theological aesthetics this “had only been broadened in a third step.” *The Glory of the Lord A Theological Aesthetics* (GL) VI (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1991) 144-211, 215-298

¹³ *In Retro* 218

¹⁴ Th II 62, 196; 215, 216; 271; 335; III 18

at the expense of the free human individual, and the dialectical system of materialistic development of nature and history evolving between Hegel and Feuerbach-Marx which only “pretends to arrive at the free individual”.¹⁵ Balthasar is conscious of how his focus on freedom in the *Theo-drama* is a defence of personal drama in the face of what is ultimately the annihilation of individuality in the perspective of Hegel.¹⁶ He is also aware that the re-definition of human autonomy from the Enlightenment onwards calls for another look at the Christian presentation of the relationship between divine and human freedom which has come centre stage.¹⁷

2 Method

In keeping with the approach discussed in the previous chapter, Balthasar begins his theo-dramatic treatment of the man-God relationship by exploring the finite-infinite freedom relationship at a general level without specific reference to God’s action in Christ, but within a framework emphatically conscious of the fact that this is the sole key to the meaning of everything else, and that the very structure of created reality points towards the need for such a meaning. The discussion of finite freedom in volume II to which we now turn is thus set in it in an abstract and ideal form such that, although it is increasingly obvious that the freedom in question must be that of man, the creature endowed with this finite freedom might just as well be angel as man, as Balthasar himself points out.¹⁸ In subsequent chapters we will see how Balthasar then goes on to focus specifically on man, the spiritual-corporeal possessor of finite freedom and its concrete shape, finally showing how man’s recapitulation of the cosmos in himself through his transcendence toward the infinite is (only) accomplished *en Christoi*.¹⁹ Our topic then is central to a theory of theo-drama

¹⁵ Balthasar: *Science, Religion and Christianity* (SRC) (Burns and Oates, London 1958) 19; *The Moment of Christian Witness* 61-76

¹⁶ cf eg Th I 413, 418, 578f; II 42; 423; SRC 19

¹⁷ eg Th I 49f

¹⁸ Th II 335

¹⁹ Ibid. 202.

in which the ‘natural’ drama of existence (between the Absolute and the relative) is consummated in the ‘supernatural’ drama between the God of Jesus Christ and mankind.²⁰

Balthasar’s approach does present him with some methodological problems. How can he write theo-dramatic theology *without* plunging straight into the action? In volume II and III of the *Theo-drama* he sets out to consider who are the *dramatis personae* of this play. It is in this context that finite and infinite freedom are introduced as ‘characters’. He emphasises a number of times that the role of those involved in the drama of salvation history cannot be abstracted from their action in this drama—we understand their role from the action itself.²¹ Nevertheless in a five volume series ‘The Action’ is the title of the *fourth* volume! Balthasar is aware of this problem of “describing the “characters of the play” before the play is actually in progress”²² but nevertheless sticks to this ordering of the *Theo-drama*. He considers it important to consider the characters and roles carefully prior to volume four, particularly because of the freedom possessed by God and man which cannot be constricted in advance by what takes place in the action but must have genuine freedom to decide this way or that.²³ Whilst the nature of divine and created freedom can only be revealed in their dramatic inter-action, it is legitimate “to abstract from the concrete dramatic conditions and inquire as to their ‘nature’, that is, the presupposition of there being such a dramatic situation in the first place”.²⁴ These considerations of character and role form the basis of a dogmatics, covering as they do the doctrines of God, Christ, man, scripture, angelology and so on. Nevertheless this is always with reference to the action. On the one hand Balthasar wants to avoid writing a static theology of essences by considering the characters from within the dramatic performance of existence; but on the other hand he wants to look at the characters before dealing with the dramatic action proper.

²⁰ Th I 130

²¹ Th II 11-13; 194, 335

²² Ibid. 11, 194, Th III 11

²³ Th III 14

²⁴ Th II 196

B Balthasar's core ontology of finite freedom

Balthasar prefixes his treatment of freedom in *Theo-drama* II with some important preliminary reflections. We shall do the same.

1 *Existence as gift*

There was nothing in me prior to his gift that could have served as a vessel for it. The first of his gifts, laying the foundation for all the others, was what I call my 'I'.²⁵

All is gift; he who receives the gift is the first gift.²⁶

Balthasar maintains that for the conscious free subject there is a natural appreciation of the fact of existence as something good, given unmerited and without his contribution, that is, as a *gift*.²⁷ This central awareness on the part of finite freedom that its own self is a 'given' is a recognition of the primal value of being.²⁸

This emphasis on being as *gift* is crucial to Balthasar's philosophy and theology and to everything we are about to set forth about finite freedom and its fulfilment. It is central to theo-drama because theo-drama is concerned with the *good*, which is understood as loving *action* which contains *real giving* "originating in the personal freedom of the giver and designed for the personal benefit of the recipient".²⁹ The emphasis on the category of gift gives certain distinctive features to finite being. It is fundamentally open and receptive (because its very self-possession is *received*, not self-manufactured) and it is responsive (because this gift has been communicated to it): "...in awakening to his own being and freedom, consciousness utters an involuntary, limitless

²⁵ Fénelon: *Lettres sur divers sujets métaphysique et de religion* I, c.4, no I (*Ouvres spirituelles* I [1810], 274) cited Th II 289

²⁶ Gabriel Marcel: *Le Mystère de l'être* II (1951), 174 cf Th II 289

²⁷ Th II 285-291 (Here he calls upon a wide range of authors including Thomas); II 391; III 458. This perspective is effectively conveyed in the German 'es gibt' cf Th I 639 n 70. cf Kenneth L Schmitz: *The Gift: Creation* (Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 1982). De Lubac made some use of the category of gift in describing man's relationship with God cf *The Theology of Henri de Lubac* 68 note 19.

²⁸ Th II 286 This contrasts with the tendency to see reality as "just there", prompting no further questions about origin and tending to focus rather on what we can do with what is there. cf also Th III 460

²⁹ Th I 18

Yes to the reality it has been given”, knowing he has been affirmed, has had the Yes of being bestowed on him by someone.³⁰

The givenness of finite freedom means that it is *indebted* for its being and that it has some obligation to respond by giving *thanks* for this gift.³¹ All this also points to the fact that finite freedom as gift has some relation to a Giver.³² Indeed for Balthasar the fact that finite freedom is a gift means that it is in a relationship of an *image* of the Giver.³³ In particular this is an image of *the* image of the Father, that is, the Son, whose indebtedness for his divinity, as we have seen, has an analogous relation to the world’s indebtedness for existence.³⁴ He is infinite freedom “in the mode (*‘tropos’*) of readiness, receptivity, obedience and hence of appropriate response; that is, he is the Father’s Word, image and expression.”³⁵ Indeed Balthasar maintains that it is in the mystery of the Trinity that self-affirmation as an act of thanksgiving to God can be made. For, in keeping with the trinitarian perspective on creation that we discussed in the previous chapter, it is here that the ‘I’ learns of the positivity of otherness and learns of its goodness to God in the Son, addressed and affirmed personally as a ‘thou’ in being given the gift of being in the Son. The creation of finite freedom, like the generation of the Son, is a form of divine kenosis.³⁶ By receiving itself, accepting what God gives, finite freedom offers the perfect act of thanksgiving to God.³⁷

The gift of finite freedom (like the gift of divinity to the Son in his eternal begetting) is emphatically *given* and not just ‘lent’³⁸ (and this is central to giving an importance to individual personhood.³⁹) We ‘possess ourselves’ and the reception of this gift of free selfhood entails a response-ability for how it is used: self-possession is both a gift and a

³⁰ Th II 286, cf also 254

³¹ eg Th II 313; 290; I 497; cf F Ulrich: “A Dangerous Reflection on the Fundamental Act of the Creature” *Communio* 23 1996 36-46

³² Th II 286; 391

³³ Th IV 142 The gift-Giver relationship also draws attention to the distinction between the two. cf V 93

³⁴ chapter 2 section C above

³⁵ Th II 267; cf also eg 261; IV 325-326

³⁶ cf IV 323

³⁷ Th II 287ff

³⁸ Ibid. 428; 290 This contrasts with Eckhart’s description of the gift of being as *borrowed* (the creature itself being nothing). cf Th V 436f

task.⁴⁰ The fact that the finite has a part to play in receiving, that it is “active in (“passive”) reception”, is what Balthasar calls the *Marian principle* which is meant to characterise the creaturely in its relationship to God.⁴¹

Finally, the receptive nature of finite freedom means that it is “a state open and exposed to the influence of heaven”;⁴² its receptivity is ongoing and is oriented to the supernatural, its ontological indebtedness meaning that it cannot “set off in just any direction but must pursue the path of self-realisation, that is, toward absolute freedom.”⁴³ So the stage is set for further giving, receiving and responding between Giver and Receiver.

2 Selbst-Sein and openness to all being: an image of the Trinity

So, being itself is a gift. Our second point is that the very structure of the gift of existence images the constitution of the divine Giver.

For Balthasar the existence of finite freedom suggests the existence of infinite freedom, for within finite freedom there is “an element of infinity”, an ‘indifference’ toward finite goods in “the absolute longing for what is always beyond our grasp”, which would be unbearable without an infinite freedom in and above itself.⁴⁴ However it is only a trinitarian, incarnational understanding of infinite freedom that really makes sense of the structure of finite free existence.

In my presence to myself I know not only that I exist but also that I am open to all being.⁴⁵ Grasp of self in principle discloses all reality, for in the consciousness that I *am* I touch “the furthest possible horizon beyond which, evidently, there can be nothing

³⁹ This is relativised in Eckhart. Th V 437

⁴⁰ Th II 213

⁴¹ Th V 441

⁴² *Moment* 89 Man is made to be receptive. Th IV 142; I 639 (dialogist Rosenzweig)

⁴³ Th II 290

⁴⁴ Ibid. 200

⁴⁵ Ibid. 207-11; 239; cf also III 272; “Theo-Logic: On the Work as a Whole” *Communio* Winter 1993 626 note 1.

more.”⁴⁶ Both the incommunicability of my own being and the unlimited communicability of being as such—which is never exhausted by all the existences which participate in it—are unveiled at the same time. As an ‘I’, as a person, I am not merely part of a whole but am aware that an unlimited number of others possess (incommunicable) being too. I can distinguish my mode of being and my grasp of universal being but I cannot separate them.

Rooted in the vision of creation taking place in Christ with its clear trinitarian location, Balthasar maintains incarnational and trinitarian implications can be uncovered in this philosophical structure in which the I grasps itself⁴⁷ (thus providing a natural relation to Christ, a path to religious awareness from which the truth can be sought—even though these crucial elements are neglected in a fallen notion of freedom⁴⁸). For Balthasar the simultaneous incommunicability and communicability of being apparent in the grasp of self suggests that as well as being an image of God in general, (communicated) being “*is actually an image of the three-personal God, in whom the incommunicability of the hypostases is one with the unity of “essence” in each of them.*”⁴⁹ For in Balthasar’s view man is not simply an image of the triune God by virtue of being a conscious spirit, which is identical in all conscious subjects (the nature shared by them all). The image is also found in the complementarity of distinct individual subjects, the God who is three as well as one making finite free being such an image of (and thus participation in) his infinite being “that the given unity (all men, as spirit, share an identical nature) embraces the miracle of *individual* unity (on the part of each spiritual subject)”.⁵⁰ “Finite freedom only exists in the interrelationship of human beings.”⁵¹ It is only in the New Testament understanding that God has internal

⁴⁶ Th II 208

⁴⁷ Th III 457

⁴⁸ Ibid. A post-enlightenment approach, for example, starts exclusively with the autonomy of the subject (neglecting the crucial ‘givenness’ from another).

⁴⁹ Th II 210 Balthasar’s italics; V 75

⁵⁰ Th III 340, 525f

⁵¹ Th II 203

relations, (revealed in Christ's relationship to the Father and the Spirit) that both forms of human unity, individual and community, are intelligible.⁵²

Thomas' understanding of being and its mediation is influential here.⁵³ In accordance with the real distinction (the non-identity between finite essence and existence), whilst God alone (the source of being) is being according to his very nature, all finite things *share* in being. Being (which is the *likeness* of God⁵⁴—not identical with Him) is the procession of existence from God into all beings, that gift of participation by virtue of which essences exist.⁵⁵ Being thus “permeates and is at work in all finite being, the most unique as well as the most general”,⁵⁶ and so is *communissimum*, that in which all communicate. Thus, according to this thomistic understanding of being, whilst I do indeed *possess* being I do so *by participation in common with all other things*. My possession of being and *everything else's* possession of being *go together*. I cannot make my claim to possession in exclusion of the others. This is why I must be open to all being, and must *let being be*, simultaneous with my grasp of being. This interrelationship of particular essence and universal participation in being images the relationship of the three distinct persons of the Trinity in their sharing of the unity of the divine essence (even though these two participations are also radically different). Thus the relationship between particular and universal discussed in Part I, and between essence and existence is ultimately an *imago trinitatis*,⁵⁷ created being owing its essential particularity to the Logos and its sharing in non-finite being to the Father.⁵⁸

⁵² Ibid. 203-206; cf 201; IV 371

⁵³ cf Th II 224ff; 239; III 458 note 6; GL IV 393-412; V 613-627 Balthasar is influenced by Gustav Siewerth here cf eg GL IV 403 note 368; 406 note 375, Th II 224 note 39 and Ouellet: “Paradox and/or Supernatural Existential” *Communio* 18 (Summer 1991) 259 note 1 (who contrasts Balthasar's understanding of being with a transcendental Thomist one).

⁵⁴ Thomas Aquinas: *The Truth* III, translated into English by Robert W Schmidt (Henry Regnery, Chicago 1954) q 22 a2 ad. 2; *Summa contra Gentiles* 3. 65 (Burns Oates & Washbourne, London 1928)

⁵⁵ “The being of things flows out from the Word as from an absolute starting point, and this flow terminates in the existence which things have in their own natures.” *Summa Theologiae* translated into English by Thomas Gilby (Blackfriars, Cambridge 1967) 1a 58 6 reply; Thomas describes “the issuing (*emanationem*) of the whole of being from the universal cause, which is God.” ST 1a 45 I

⁵⁶ Th II 239

⁵⁷ Th V 75-76

⁵⁸ Ibid. 76, cf also 68

If the gift of being images the Giver, is a likeness of the divine goodness as Thomas maintains, then “all knowers know God implicitly in every mental act”,⁵⁹ and have a natural orientation towards Him. As this gift of being is necessarily shared the relationship between individual possession of being and openness to all other participators in being has a particular significance to this ‘inner path to God’. It means that it is trinitarian.

3 Self-transcendence towards the Good, ‘letting be’ and the image of the trinitarian constitution of Absolute Being

Balthasar takes further the image relation between the coincidence of self-possession and openness to all being and the trinitarian constitution of absolute being. Our openness to being involves an *indifference*, which not only refers to our infinite longing for what is more,⁶⁰ but specifies the deeper disinterestedness of letting being be for the sake of a thing’s goodness.⁶¹

Dependent on absolute freedom for its essence, finite freedom’s origin governs its goal: the good in itself. It has a fundamental self-transcendence towards the absolute good, towards an ultimate state with God (even if it chooses to make itself the self-sufficient good).⁶² Balthasar therefore acknowledges that finite freedom in its openness to all being can only strive for what it perceives to be good.⁶³ However, without really criticising Thomas,⁶⁴ against the apparent ‘unfreedom’ of a finite freedom that must seek

⁵⁹ *The Truth*. qu 22 a 2 ad 1 (cf Th II 391)

⁶⁰ Th II 200

⁶¹ For Being is both true and good by nature (Th II 210), with Thomas, “the image—*similitudo*—of divine goodness” (II 225; GL IV 393; 400ff; cf also Oullet: “Paradox” 259 note 1; for references to Thomas cf note 54 above) and as the soul only has its ‘for itself’ (which cannot be lost) because of the luminous quality [*Gelichtetsein*] of the totality of being, the ‘letting be’ of all other beings because of their freedom is an essential part of the imperishable freedom of the soul. “An existent being is good for me because it complements my particularity...I must allow it to maintain its own independent reality, for only then can it be regarded as a good.” (II 240)

⁶² Th V 300, 295, 394; I 414ff

⁶³ Th II 211

⁶⁴ Ibid. 226, 211 Thomas has his own expression of “indifference” as the “part” (that is, myself with my self-possession) loving the whole more than itself, and so, for example, the enjoyment of eternal life is being bound in love to God for his own sake. He can say with Augustine (*De Doctrina Christiana* 1.5) “enjoying something means clinging to it by love for its own sake.” ST 2a2ae 27 3 *sed contra* translated into English by R J Batten (Blackfriars, Cambridge 1975)

the good in general,⁶⁵ he wants to play off the Anselmian-Augustinian-Franciscan idea of *loving the good, 'letting it be', for its own sake*.⁶⁶ This is “indifference”, and the beginning of surrender and love.

This brings us to the specific and original detail of Balthasar’s understanding of finite letting be as an *imago Trinitatis*. In keeping with what we have already said about the kenotic self-renunciation at the heart of the Godhead,⁶⁷ from the revelation of the triune life of God we see that infinite freedom’s self-possession is understood as self-giving or self-surrender, as *love*,⁶⁸ and that *letting-be* belongs to the very nature of infinite freedom: “the Father *lets* the Son be consubstantial God, and so forth”.⁶⁹ This is why we have the “‘absolutely positive aspect of differentiation’ in absolute Being”⁷⁰ encountered in chapter two in the grounding of the God-world difference in the inter-trinitarian difference. As the divine hypostases proceed from one another they are perfectly open to one another, but not interchangeable (as we have seen, there is opposition, distance). They are transparent to one another yet have their own “impenetrable ‘personal’ mystery” and “constitute the greatest imaginable opposition to one another...in order that they can mutually interpenetrate in the most intimate manner conceivable.”⁷¹ The degree to which each knows and interpenetrates the others is the degree to which each, in absolute freedom, opens up to the others; and none is overwhelmed by being known in this way because each of the hypostases subsists by being *let-be*.⁷²

So in the very structure of the ‘I’-grasp (in which receipt of being requires letting other beings be) our imaging of the triune God (in whom the self-possession of the divine persons coincides with their mutual self-surrender) is implied. This perspective is

⁶⁵ Th II 225-226

⁶⁶ Ibid. 211-212, 226

⁶⁷ cf chapter 2 section C above

⁶⁸ Th II 256-258 This is in agreement with the identity of ‘having’ and ‘giving’ expounded by Ferdinand Ulrich. (cf also III 518)

⁶⁹ Th II 259; V 93

⁷⁰ Th II 258 (with references to Siewerth)

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. 259

central to Balthasar's understanding of the God-man relationship in its origins and also in its fulfilment, as will be unfolded in greater detail when we go on to consider the fulfilment of this 'natural' image in the grace of perfect conformity. Then we will find it is the incarnation in particular that makes sense of finite freedom's yearning for what transcends the confines of the finite. For should finite freedom cross over to infinite freedom in the interests of its fulfilment it would lose its own finite shape and thus its very self (as in Buddhism and other forms of non-Christian mysticism). In the next chapter we will see that what is required is the unique christological indwelling of infinite freedom in finite freedom in which the finite is perfected in the infinite without the infinite losing itself in the finite and vice versa.⁷³

4 The core ontology of finite freedom

Characteristic of Balthasar's expression of these trinitarian and incarnational implications uncovered in the philosophical structure in which the 'I' grasps itself is his use of analysis that accords with personalist philosophy.⁷⁴ At this level of expression the same two-fold aspect of our grasp of self is identified in the fact that human self-awakening is only possible when the self is addressed as a 'thou' by some other 'I'.⁷⁵ Thus in a recurrent focus on the primal act of spiritual life where the child is awakened to awareness of self and of the world by the loving address of a 'thou',⁷⁶ Balthasar finds three elements in which the same features of self-possession already discussed can be identified. Firstly there is the ontological *indebtedness*, an awareness that being a self is inseparable from owing oneself to another, ultimately to infinite freedom. Secondly there is the awareness that "where being lays hold of itself, it lays hold of being at its deepest and broadest"—not that I exhaust this being, but I must leave room for an unlimited number of others. This is an experience of the structure of being as such

⁷³ Ibid. 201-202 and cf chapter 5 section D below

⁷⁴ Balthasar's acknowledgement of personalism is not uncritical. cf LA 36-39; Th I 34-37; chapter 7 section A below

⁷⁵ Th II 286; 203; 388-389

⁷⁶ Th II 388-91; III 175, 457-458; cf also LA 61f, *In Retro* 114; GL V 616

which, as we have already mentioned, is thus seen to contain an “‘image’ of the trinitarian constitution of absolute Being”.⁷⁷ Lastly there is the awareness that having been thus addressed I am called to respond, am entrusted with a mission.⁷⁸

For Balthasar these three points make up *the core of an ontology of finite freedom*. This is in accord both with modern personalism and with Thomas’s insight in the real distinction between essence and existence, according to which, as we have seen, finite created being is not its own existence but *receives* it (and thus unlike divine being—“always perfectly fulfilled, identical with itself”⁷⁹— has never completely realised its essence). The being-in-its-totality (which one must respect simultaneous with admittance into one’s own being) is in fact a world that must let Being “be” if it is to grasp its own being. It only shares in Being⁸⁰ (the *non-identity* of the real distinction in contrast to the *identity* that belongs to divine being).

All that is wanting here then is a background in the form of Augustine’s *desiderium naturale visionis Dei*, that vocation to union with God⁸¹ which means that man fulfils himself beyond himself in a grace not at his disposal⁸² (the paradoxical understanding of nature discussed in chapter one). In this way we see that the Augustinian starting point that Balthasar shares with de Lubac, incorporating a Thomist ontology, has been developed by Balthasar in such a way that the image of the Trinity is interpreted *interpersonally*, not chiefly in terms of the individual soul, because creatures are created in the Son, who is primarily receptive.⁸³ There is then a continual mutual awakening and indebtedness within creation pointing ultimately to an absolute interpersonal Being from whom the constant flow of individual beings come and to whom they return. It is the Christian picture of God alone, unveiled in Jesus Christ, that gives us a glimpse of the mystery of this eternal reciprocity and interpenetration. However in his very self-

⁷⁷ Th III 458

⁷⁸ cf chapter 7 section A below

⁷⁹ ET I 163

⁸⁰ Th III 458 note 6 (cf GL V 613-27)

⁸¹ Th III 415

⁸² Ibid. 416 note 31; II 178; IV 142

⁸³ Ibid. 459 note 7

awareness the individual in the world's relationship to the triune God in Christ is identifiable, even though he cannot grasp this meaning but must be grasped by it. Thus we apprehend the outline of that movement *gratia perfecit natura* in this vision of finite being and its vocation. "What begins, at the natural, personal level, as our having to believe in another's freedom and love", that is in the necessarily inter-subjective self-possession, "is perfected at the "supernatural" level, where human freedom...is challenged to make an ultimate act of faith in absolute freedom and love."⁸⁴ The fact that man's finite freedom can only find itself in relationship with other human beings who share this freedom is an *imago trinitatis* and a shadowy image of the fact that he is called through grace to realise his freedom in that sharing of (infinite) freedom that takes place in the love exchange of the persons of the Trinity.⁸⁵

For the fact that a human 'I' only wakens to itself by another 'I' calling it 'thou' is just the 'worldly' prelude of the awakening and affirmation uncovered by the revelation of the interpersonal constitution of the triune life and the discovery that the relation of finite spiritual creature to the infinite creator is a dynamic, personal 'I'-'thou' relationship. In and through the human 'I' is manifested the Absolute 'I' who from eternity has generated an Absolute 'Thou' with whom, in Spirit, he is One God.⁸⁶ This trinitarian process of generation causes the absolute preciousness/holiness of Absolute Being "to shine forth in its limitless self-affirmation and freedom."⁸⁷ Recalling the fundamental link between the primal life of the Trinity and the origin of creation,⁸⁸ it is only on the basis of the improbable miracle of the constitution of the triune God⁸⁹ (the self-surrender of the "Father-origin" generates the co-eternal Son and their union causes the procession of the Spirit from both) that finite freedom, having been given the gift of

⁸⁴ Ibid. 459-460

⁸⁵ Th V 302

⁸⁶ Th II 286

⁸⁷ Ibid. 287

⁸⁸ chapter 2 section C above

⁸⁹ Th II 287

self, can know itself to be addressed as a ‘thou’, designate itself an ‘I’ vis-à-vis the Giver and then must go on to address infinite freedom as ‘Thou’.⁹⁰

Of course finite freedom can only use this extraordinary form of address for the God who in himself is no one else’s other (the All-embracing one (*non-aliud*)) because it is responding to the ‘thou’ addressed to it “from the inner nature of the Absolute—from the divine Trinity”.⁹¹ Without this, finite freedom’s attitude could not go beyond, at most, an awe-filled worship. It is only when I learn (in the Son) that I am a good to God (and thus have being and freedom guaranteed) that I recognise that God is my highest good and that I can trust in the gift of self and affirm myself.⁹² If I accept that I am addressed as a particular ‘thou’ not to be confused with any other⁹³ then it follows that my gratitude will not be addressed to an anonymous ‘Absolute Good’ but to infinite freedom as a unique, particular ‘Thou’.⁹⁴ Again the use of this extraordinary form of address is illuminated by the inner trinitarian life of God who has always expressed himself in his eternal Word.

As an understanding of our relation to God is grounded in an understanding of God in relation to himself, that is his triune constitution, we can see that in the trinitarian perspective on creation the relationship of the hypostases in the Trinity is the key to the relationship between infinite and finite freedom. For Balthasar it clearly frees us from both (pantheistic) mysticism and (formalist) ritualism, for the discovery that I am affirmed by God as a ‘thou’ in the Son, means our relationship with God does not entail ‘being swallowed up’ in his infinitude, but nor are we reduced “to a mere awareness of distance between the finite and the infinite”, for we have our locus *in* him. In the next chapter we shall consider how this trinitarianly rooted relation is a dynamic one and investigate Balthasar’s description of the movement towards the conformity of finite freedom’s “watermark” with what Balthasar calls the “idea” reserved for the finite

⁹⁰ Regarding the influence of the dialogist, Ebner cf Th I 641.

⁹¹ Th II 287, cf 421

⁹² Ibid. 287

⁹³ cf Ibid. 302

⁹⁴ Ibid. 290

‘thou’ in the infinite ‘Thou’. First though, in the next section of this chapter, we must examine the basic structure of finite freedom in Balthasar’s view.

C Bi-polar structure of finite freedom

In the light of the two-fold aspect of the ‘I’ grasp and its quality of *imago trinitatis*, we can now unfold the two-fold structure of finite freedom—which also contains a reflection of the Trinity.

Finite freedom includes two poles that interpenetrate each other. The first can be described as *autexousion* (‘being-from-within-oneself’), the capacity for self determination that belongs to our fundamental *self-possession* (received in creation in a way analogous to the Son’s receipt of the autonomy of the divine nature in the mode of receptivity⁹⁵), remembering that self possession, ‘consent to ourselves’, always involves (indifferent) openness to all being.⁹⁶ The second can be described as *self-realisation*, movement beyond ourselves to the other, making choices as we strive for the good (ultimately involving consent to the disclosure of the infinite freedom in which alone we can realise ourselves).⁹⁷ So there is both independence/autonomy on the one hand and openness, ultimately dependence, on the other.

The second pole “necessarily arises out of the way our original self-possession is constituted and the conditions that make it possible”⁹⁸ (that is, it coincides with openness to the ‘letting be’ of all being) and it cannot be reduced to the first. To carry out such a reduction and interpret finite freedom solely in terms of the first pole, would be to turn the *autexousion* (self-determination) into *autarkia* (total self-sufficiency),⁹⁹ a distortion that Balthasar’s whole description militates against, but without invalidating the significance of the first pole. The quality of *disinterestedness* in our striving beyond

⁹⁵ Th IV 328 For God there is therefore a kenotic aspect.

⁹⁶ eg Th II 210-212, 215, 217, 227

⁹⁷ eg Ibid. 211-212, 217, 228, 242

⁹⁸ Ibid. 212

⁹⁹ cf Ibid.; IV 370

ourselves for other goods, is an indication of the irreducibility of the second to the first.¹⁰⁰ The tendency since the Enlightenment to understand freedom by starting exclusively with the ‘autonomy’ of the ‘subject’ breaks off the “inner path to God” that we have seen contained within the structure of our self-possession,¹⁰¹ although this does not mean that Balthasar is unhappy to use some post-enlightenment descriptions of human autonomy.¹⁰²

However, undermining the first pole is an equally mistaken position: attempts to convince man that his self-subsistence is an illusion to be overcome “can only destroy the outer, empirical layers of “I” consciousness, not its inner core.”¹⁰³ Instead Balthasar’s study of freedom shows his conviction that freedom involves both poles. The first is unequivocally “given”; the second is both “given” [*gegeben*] and “laid upon us” [*aufgegeben*]¹⁰⁴ (in keeping with the relation between ‘gift’ and ‘task/response’ mentioned above¹⁰⁵). The “*autexousion* is posited unrestrictedly as the prime datum”, but significantly this very datum of finite freedom is itself a *gift* (*gegeben*), so, in accordance with what we have said about the importance of existence as gift, it cannot simply be thought of as a datum in the sense that it is ‘just there’; on the contrary it is *received*. Nevertheless like any authentic gift it is truly given and not just lent, and is therefore a real possession.¹⁰⁶

A second step demonstrates that having been posited in this way (given) freedom must also realise itself. Whilst the first pole then is an intrinsic possession the second must also be actualised by ‘the other’. In this “indissolubly twofold aspect” freedom “is the gift of ‘beginning from oneself’ (*autexousion*), yet it always contains the second dimension, namely, the obligation to leave room (in the vast expanse of being) for an

¹⁰⁰ Th II 212; 227-228

¹⁰¹ Th III 457

¹⁰² As in his understanding that the *autexousion* contains “an element of absoluteness” (Th II 228), coming from Schelling’s development of Kant (I 49), whilst particularly attributed to Siewerth’s analysis of the “fourfold absoluteness” in free will, and given a patristic-scholastic background (Gregory, Bernard) (223).

¹⁰³ Th II 212

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ section B1 above (cf Th II 213)

unimaginable number of others, equally free.”¹⁰⁷ Associated with this second dimension of openness to other freedom “is the obligation to acknowledge one’s indebtedness to the source of unconditional freedom.” For finite freedom is unable to uncover its own origins or obtain its own goal; it is ‘given’ and must return to its source in order to reach its goal¹⁰⁸ (that is the total liberation which can only be found in unconditional, infinite freedom).

1 Patristic and scholastic influence

Balthasar supports this analysis with a survey of patristic and scholastic understanding of freedom, which retrieves from the various descriptions (and various extremes) and makes his own a perspective so inclusive of both poles that “the ‘either-or’ of autonomy and heteronomy that haunts the entire Christian tradition is overcome right at the outset”.¹⁰⁹

Balthasar describes the patristic central focus on finite freedom and its autonomy, without giving the impression that the Church Fathers held a modern view of autonomous freedom. Since Genesis and Old Testament passages dependent on it see human freedom as given, the Fathers and scholastics did not find it difficult to use the exploration of the structure of finite freedom carried out in Greek thought in the service of a theologically thought out Christian doctrine of freedom. However, Balthasar identifies a gradual recognition of the importance of finite freedom *precisely as the presupposition of the Biblical, especially, Christian drama between God and man* and it is in this light that patristic concern with finite freedom should be understood, not in the modern sense of focusing on it for its own sake.¹¹⁰ This freedom had to be defended

¹⁰⁶ cf Th II 290, 428

¹⁰⁷ Th IV 370

¹⁰⁸ Regarding the neo-platonic influence here cf section C1 below “Gregory of Nyssa”.

¹⁰⁹ Th II 224 In his ‘dramatic resources’ Balthasar finds a coincidence of the determination of destiny and the *servum arbitrium* of the reformation on the one hand, *and* the space for man to choose and to make his own contribution on the other, in the dramas and comedias of Calderon. I 361ff. Modern dramatists on the other hand “like to represent man’s freedom as his personal possession, which God cannot touch.” I 429

¹¹⁰ Th II 215, 216

against the contrasting pagan, gnostic and Manichean determinism, hence the characteristic holding fast to the *autexousion*¹¹¹ as the prime datum—which must go on to realise itself within the context of divine freedom.

Augustine — For Augustine it is his refutation of the Manichees in his early period that provides the occasion for his assertion of the *liberum arbitrium*, just as later it is against Pelagius that the second pole is developed. Again such concern with the first pole is not independent of the second: the foundations of the later elaboration are already evident.¹¹² His is a synthesis¹¹³ then that is upset by misinterpretations that absolutise partial aspects.¹¹⁴ For him “finite freedom as such is the rational, autonomous motion of the soul, in which the “I” possesses itself in freedom¹¹⁵ and every freedom—whether finite or infinite—has *liberum arbitrium* and it is this first pole, “freedom as the soul’s own power of making decisions”¹¹⁶ that he defended against the Manichees. He does not start by *defining* finite freedom as freedom to choose good and evil—this is what finite freedom is necessarily equipped with, but the main thrust is that finite freedom can only fulfil itself (this is the task, the choice given in finite freedom’s second pole) in the context of infinite freedom.¹¹⁷ Here then we encounter a characteristic of Augustine’s doctrine of freedom already raised in relation to what Balthasar called Barth’s Augustinian definition of freedom,¹¹⁸ that is, one that understands freedom primarily in terms of its fulfilment in submission to God, a basic perspective on freedom with which Balthasar concurs. We noticed in *Karl Barth*, however, how Balthasar accused Barth of adopting a *narrow* Augustinian model which, in the terminology of the *Theo-drama*, has little or no room for the first pole. Here though, we encounter Balthasar’s corrective of this in his inclusion of Augustine’s

¹¹¹ This is not therefore an early pelagianism. Th II 215, 217 (eg Irenaeus describes man as “created in autonomy (*idian exousian*) from the beginning...so that he can follow God’s counsel (*gnome*) freely, without compulsion”. Adv Haer IV, 27, 3-4, cited Th II 216,)

¹¹² cf Th II 222

¹¹³ His synthesis is inspired by and an answer to Plotinus. Ibid. 234

¹¹⁴ Ibid. (Luther and Jansen.) cf his note 68 and also 223-224 including note 38.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 231

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 232 note 64

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 232

recognition of the freedom to choose (as a presupposition defended against the Manichees), although Augustine himself is not entirely exonerated from adopting extreme modes of expression himself in his battle with Pelagius.

The Augustinian contribution to the paradox retrieved by de Lubac according to which man fulfils himself beyond himself is looked at from a theo-dramatic angle, concerned with the interaction of freedoms. For in focusing on finite freedom's sole fulfilment in infinite freedom, we go beyond the capacities belonging to finite freedom's structure. Whilst indeed it cannot be compelled by anything but itself to choose the path of slavery rather than freedom,¹¹⁹ the imparting of infinite freedom is clearly not in the power of finite freedom: "by definition infinite freedom is free to impart itself to others". This is grace, "the freely given indwelling of infinite freedom in finite freedom."¹²⁰

Balthasar's consideration of Augustine's defence of the second pole against Pelagius¹²¹ brings out the role of the Spirit and the primacy of love in this respect. In his interpretation of Augustine the Spirit is "essentially freedom,"¹²² but freedom as 'gift'¹²³ or 'grace'... '*spiritus gratiae*'.¹²⁴ It is only when God's love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us¹²⁵ that the confrontation between the law and the man not yet liberated to enjoy the freedom of the children of God is brought into flux. In the next chapter we will see how important this perspective is to Balthasar in his specifically christological framing of it as the fulfilment of finite freedom in infinite freedom and in his own pneumatological emphasis. In Balthasar's view Augustine maintains the twofold aspect characteristic of the new relationship between finite and

¹¹⁸ chapter 2 section A1 above.

¹¹⁹ Augustine: *The Trinity* IV, 13 in *The Fathers of the Church* Volume 45, translated into English by Stephen McKenna, C.S.S.R (The Catholic University of America Press, Inc. 1981) 150-154.; Th II 232

¹²⁰ Th II 232

¹²¹ Th 232-234 Here Balthasar focuses on Augustine's *On the Spirit and the Letter*

¹²² Th II 233; see *On the Spirit and the Letter* 28, 52 where Augustine quotes 2 Corinthians 3:17: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom", (Philip Schaff, ed.: *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* V *Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings* (WMB Eerdmans, Michigan 1978)).

¹²³ *On the Spirit* 26

¹²⁴ *On the Spirit* 13, 15, 20

infinite freedom. Finite freedom is no longer a mere *counterpart* to infinite freedom, it is fulfilled in and through infinite freedom (which is freely self-giving love). However this happens without finite freedom being absorbed into infinite.¹²⁶ We have become sons but do not cease to be servants; there is both “congruity and at the same time distance”.¹²⁷ “Biblically speaking, finite freedom is lit up from within by the glorious radiance that comes from infinite freedom” to those who love it.¹²⁸ All this happens in a sphere where there is a mutual sublimation of command and gift, ultimately a sphere of the simple presence of the Holy Spirit. The consent and the achievement of the goal go together.¹²⁹

Gregory of Nyssa — In Balthasar’s exploration of the different approach taken by the East his attention is focused on Gregory of Nyssa whose synthesis, like Augustine’s, is also inspired by Plotinus¹³⁰ and also arrives at “finite freedom’s complete dependence on and indebtedness to infinite freedom”,¹³¹ although by a different root to Augustine’s.¹³² In Gregory’s high understanding of freedom, finite freedom (influenced by Plotinus’s understanding of the *nous*) is a pure motion coming from and proceeding toward infinite freedom and is the closest possible image of God.¹³³ It does not create itself, but ceaselessly receives itself from its source, a “spring that wells up eternally”,¹³⁴ which can only be infinite freedom.

¹²⁵ Rom 5.5

¹²⁶ *On the Spirit* 52 (grace does not make free will void), 59 (“We do not take away free will”).

¹²⁷ *On the Spirit* 28

¹²⁸ *On the Spirit* 31

¹²⁹ Th II 234

¹³⁰ Ibid. 231 “These two, above all, expressly on the basis of Plotinus, undertook to transpose the philosophical “one and many” model into the living relationship between infinite and finite freedom.” For Balthasar’s early interest in Plotinus cf Scola: *Hans Urs von Balthasar a Theological Style* (Eerdmans, Michigan 1995) 21 note 11

¹³¹ Th II 235 Everything created is in a condition of slavery (*douleia*) until saved by the uncreated God coming amongst us as a servant. *Against Eunomius* Bk V 4 in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* V (Parker, Oxford 1893) 179

¹³² Th II 235 Augustine begins with Adam’s “somehow colourless” “*posse non peccare*” arriving after sin and redemptive grace at “*non posse peccare*”. Gregory begins dialectically with finite freedom’s “infinite” openness to infinite freedom on the one hand and, on the other, the pathic element in man’s original nature meaning that when it falls it will come up against the limits of temporality and evil and thus, through the resulting suffering, ‘come to its senses’ and be freed from “passionate craving” and finally open up to infinite freedom. (cf also II 237) Regarding the influence of Plato and Aristotle cf Th II 213-214.

¹³³ Ibid. 234-5

¹³⁴ *De Anima et Resurrectione* in *Patrologia Graeca* 46 105B

As this happens to finite freedom an eternal movement is begun in it. Rather than moving away from its source it aims to “realise itself by assimilation to it”.¹³⁵ Gregory states that freedom—which God has made autonomous and like that which has no master—“is identity with its own nature and assimilation to it.”¹³⁶ So, in so far as freedom is both poles—the datum of the *autexousion* and the infinite movement toward its origin in infinite freedom—it can only fulfil itself in infinite freedom. In this movement of becoming, originating with Plotinus, ‘baptised’ by Gregory and absorbed into Balthasar’s specifically intra-trinitarian christocentric perspective, finite freedom is always distinguished from God in that it comes from him and goes to him who is “without motion where all change is concerned”.¹³⁷ It is a movement written into the very nature of finite freedom¹³⁸ and, as freedom is a free gift of the Eternal and the Good, it is characterised by an instinct for what is always better. “In a certain sense”, Gregory says, the soul “is constantly being created in that it transforms itself, through growth in what is good, into what is better.”¹³⁹ Whilst for Origen ‘indifference’ constitutes freedom of choice, for Gregory the innermost nature of freedom of choice is the movement toward self-realisation within infinite freedom. It is thus that finite freedom can be the image of infinite freedom. Its innermost nature is revealed in the humanity of Christ.¹⁴⁰ Platonic and Origenistic “satiation” is no longer possible because ever-greater infinite freedom continually expands the finite freedom that moves within it (“satiety and yearning mutually heighten each other”¹⁴¹). Balthasar concludes that “the element of infinity that indwells finite freedom comes from the free gift of infinite freedom: the latter not only “frees” finite freedom and gives it room to operate but actually opens

¹³⁵ Th II 236

¹³⁶ *De Anima et Resurrectione* in *Patrologia Graeca* 46 101D

¹³⁷ *Patrologia Graeca* 45 1253B

¹³⁸ Movement and change belong to the nature of finite freedom as something created. *De Hominis Opificio* in *Patrologia Graeca* 44 184 CD

¹³⁹ *On the Songs of Songs* VI in *Patrologia Graeca* 44 885D

¹⁴⁰ cf *Oratio Catechetica* XXI in *Patrologia Graeca* 45 60a

¹⁴¹ *De Beatitudinibus Oratio* IV *Patrologia Graeca* 44 1245B

itself to it as the context of its self-fulfilment” in God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ, (the key insight unavailable to Plotinus).¹⁴²

Thomas — Balthasar thinks that the oriental and occidental streams converge in Aquinas.¹⁴³ As regards freedom as autonomous motion, he defends the self-determination of the will in its search through the whole breadth of being for the absolute good, God.¹⁴⁴ Human reason, as well as the autonomous motion of the will, is seen as *causa sui*¹⁴⁵ in judgement since it evaluates existing things under the aspect of being (will’s free autonomous motion entailing insight into being in its totality) and can evaluate its own judgements (unlike animals). Balthasar is clear that this *causa sui motus* is not the same kind of self positing in Being that God exercises.¹⁴⁶

And so, as with our analysis of Augustine, we arrive at the Thomistic paradox rediscovered by de Lubac. For the *causa sui motus* means there is “in the will a natural longing (*desiderium naturale*) for complete, exhaustive self-possession, which would have to coincide with the “possession” of being as such”.¹⁴⁷ Man is quite unable to achieve his natural desire. He “strives to fulfil himself in an absolute and yet, although he is “*causa sui*”, he is unable to achieve this by his own power or by attaining any finite thing or finite good.¹⁴⁸

Men themselves are the natural sources of their own activity through mind and will. Yet the final happiness prepared for the saints surpasses both our thinking and our willing...Such happiness goes beyond our natural reach...Man’s complete happiness, as we have found, consists in the vision of the divine essence and this is beyond the natural stretch of any creature.¹⁴⁹

The fact that in the end finite freedom only attains self-fulfilment in a dimension beyond its own striving is the further aspect of this paradox.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴² Th II 238

¹⁴³ Ibid. 238 (239)

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 225; cf also though the apparent ‘unfreedom’ regarding the formal object Ibid. 226; section B3 above

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 225-226; *Truth* q 24 a 1 reply.

¹⁴⁶ *Truth* q 22

¹⁴⁷ Th II 225; *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3 25, 3-50

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 225-226 Balthasar says that for Thomas this paradox is man’s dignity.

¹⁴⁹ *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae 5,5 *sed contra*, *responsio* translated into English by Thomas Gilby (Blackfriars, Cambridge 1969)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 226

When it comes to the question of the consent of the second pole Balthasar focuses on Thomas' understanding of the mediation of being, discussed above, *esse* grounding both self-being and communication with the Absolute.¹⁵¹ He thinks that reference to the inseparably twofold nature of the primal act of self-knowledge (that is, that it includes the openness to/awareness of all being (beyond particular beings) as well as grasping our own being)¹⁵² is necessary for understanding how infinite freedom can indwell finite enabling it to be genuine, finite freedom. 'Letting be' and indifference are therefore crucial to the second pole. For Balthasar the second pole of finite freedom, the openness to all being¹⁵³ is "the elevated position of 'indifference'"¹⁵⁴ which must be realised by going out of ourselves and making choices in relation to and affecting everything with which we share existence, which is recognised as good and true.

This raises a further question about how finite freedom relates to "the other" when exercising its openness.¹⁵⁵ If the 'I'-pole were absolute it would think of the other good and true things that share being as things to be used.¹⁵⁶ But, as we have seen, this pole is not absolute: there is no articulation of the first pole without the openness to all being which shows "this prime thing (myself) as only one being among others."¹⁵⁷ In Thomas, as in the patristic tradition, the autonomous motion of the will involves insight into being in its totality and judgement of everything under the aspect of being and of the good;¹⁵⁸ and within the horizon of being-in-its-totality also disclosed by the 'I' pole other beings are seen to constitute poles of their own too. This indifference of the second pole, illuminated by the idea of the love of the good for its own sake, brings the second pole into full view clearly indicating that striving for the good is not a matter of self-interest, the element of interest being removed by "the knowledge of *the good as*

¹⁵¹ Th II 224; cf section B2 above

¹⁵² Ibid. 239; 207-11

¹⁵³ Ibid. 211

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 227-228

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 228

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 239, 228, 211

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 211

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 225

good”,¹⁵⁹ and the element of indifference taking on a depth in which the one who strives for the good “*is able to let the Good “be”, whether it be a finite or an infinite Good, simply for the sake of its goodness, without trying to gain it for himself.*”¹⁶⁰ This is the way of love.

2 Towards the relationship of freedom and grace

Choices have to be made about the exercise of the second pole if its elevated indifference is to be realised. Once the idea of ‘use’ for the sake of self enrichment has been eliminated along the lines indicated above, we begin to move towards the understanding that openness may not be self-fulfilled. This is, of course, key to the concept of grace. The alternative to ‘use’ is looking at finite freedom’s openness as “the opportunity to hand itself over to infinite free Being, to the Being who is the Giver of this free openness.”¹⁶¹ This is illuminated by the intersubjective reality that finite freedom cannot appropriate or incorporate others into itself: “the freedom of the “other” must disclose itself by opening up its own inner area.” Thus what we might call an ‘*analogia caritatis*’ between the relationships of finite freedoms and the relationship between finite and infinite freedom (ultimately based on the free self-surrendering and ‘letting be’ relations of the triune persons), gives the crucial preliminary insight that “ultimately, a relation between finite and infinite freedom must involve self disclosure on the part of infinite freedom.”¹⁶²

The idea of self-disclosure on the part of the infinite is also suggested when the origin and goal of the soul’s self possession is considered. The enigmatic state of finite freedom possessing in its *autexousion* “an element of absoluteness,¹⁶³ an “infinite finitude”, but because it is “a given” unable to get back to its origins or therefore to reach its destination by pursuing the totality of goods and values in the world, is the boundary

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 211

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. Balthasar’s italics

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 228

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 228, 223

where the idea of infinite freedom's self-disclosure arises.¹⁶⁴ The philosophical perspective recognises that the origin of the soul's self-possession, the self-luminosity shared, in principle, by all that has being, must be the very ground of being "which we cannot 'get behind' and which the questioning mind cannot approach, as it were, from the outside (because it is part of it)."¹⁶⁵ Self-possession, the judging and the striving are the transcendental modes¹⁶⁶ of all-pervasive Being which indwells the soul. Thus spiritual being has the highest form of participation in Being. Philosophy, however, cannot fully answer this question of origins. For if I only encounter Being in finite beings, we are presented with the question of how nonsubsistent non-finite reality can be realised in subsisting finite centres which are spiritual and free by virtue of their participation in Being. If philosophy concludes that Being-in-its-totality is *Subjekthaftigkeit* (has the quality of a subject) this coheres with the self-propagation of non-finite Being in finite subjects but seems to conflict with its *Formalität* (formality) and its noncenteredness. "The only possibility is that, within Being, a nonparticipative subjectivity should disclose itself, coextensive with Being-in-its-totality, possessing infinite reason, infinite will and infinite freedom."¹⁶⁷

In Romans I: 19 Paul assumes that such a revelation has taken place. Thus the finite mind is challenged right from the start to see the manifestation of the absolute ground (that is, God) in the necessary formal object and so "acknowledge (*doxazein*) that its own freedom is immanent not only in all-encompassing Being but in infinite freedom", and that divine freedom and infinite will is immanent in its own finite free being and will "as the ultimate ground of its own, given, de facto freedom."¹⁶⁸ Of course the alternative decision can be taken to retreat from this immanence, to try to be its own ground. This surrender to idolatry, which attempts to satisfy the spirit's infinite capacity for Being

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 228

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. 240

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 228

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 241

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

with finite substance, will ultimately require the dissolving of the finite spiritual centres into non-finite Being.

But finite freedom cannot and does not need to construct a realm of fulfilment through the denial of its finite limits.¹⁶⁹ For this space is given in its own structure (it is “coconstituent of finite freedom”), *not* as that within which it can fulfil itself, but as “a setting-out toward that which alone—in infinite freedom—can communicate itself as positive, infinite freedom”, or, to use the scholastic terminology, the *desiderium naturale ‘visionis’* (thus confirming that desire for God is natural, a constituent of finite freedom). Here it is described as the “unfillable realm that lies below freedom of choice”,¹⁷⁰ that wealth of ‘being open’ from which decision must be made, the infinite finitude impossible to fulfil by the pursuit of the totality of goods and values in the world,¹⁷¹ the elevated indifference from which the Good and True can be desired for their own sake. A philosophy of freedom has thus come upon the natural desire for the living God, a realm that cannot be filled, except by that which alone can freely “communicate itself as positive, infinite freedom.”¹⁷²

These points begin to elucidate how surrender to the initiative of the infinite is not a contradiction or alienation of the given self possession of finite freedom. For we are aware first of all of the frustrating limits of finite freedom, that finite freedom cannot fulfil itself, cannot even go back to its origins nor fill itself with the use of other things. Yet the idea of the disclosure of the ground of being allows us to see this very limitedness as the point of development where finite freedom goes out toward, opens to, has natural desire for the self disclosing initiative of infinite freedom. So, surrender, consent to the other, rather than contradicting the autonomy of the first pole is in fact the necessary counterpart if real freedom is to be exercised and is to grow. So we see that although he is *causa sui*, man cannot achieve the natural desire for true self

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 241-242.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 242

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 228

¹⁷² Ibid. 242

possession by his own efforts but only in open movement towards and the self communication of infinite freedom who has perfect self-possession.¹⁷³

Balthasar thus regains freedom as a Christian concept. Freedom as rational spontaneity can be seen as the nature of the creature as long as it is seen with the second element, which is integral to finitude. The “either-or” of autonomy and heteronomy is replaced by a theonomy which both bestows and fulfils a genuine but nevertheless ‘dependent autonomy’ in the freedom of self-surrender. And, as we will see in more detail in the next chapter, the key to this perfection of human freedom—unachievable from below—is identified as the mediating Spirit of God.

D Natural desire and the supernatural existential in the *Theo-drama*

Before we move on there are two further points to cover. Firstly there is the extent to which the theo-dramatic reaffirmation of the conviction learnt from de Lubac that natural desire is truly natural, apparent in the latter part of this analysis, involves a development from the position discussed in chapter one with its slightly ambivalent relation to the solution proposed by Karl Rahner.¹⁷⁴ Secondly there is the specific relation between the bi-polar structure of freedom, nature and grace and the Trinity.

In the previous chapter we saw that this recognition of the ‘naturalness’ of natural desire was one of Balthasar’s reasons for rejecting the concept of the supernatural existential, for man’s horizon does not need to be elevated to the desire for God as he is in himself¹⁷⁵ and this *natural* desire does not have a *supernatural* element in it.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless we do still find evidence of some kind of ‘triadic’ scheme in the *Theo-*

¹⁷³ Ibid. 331, 225-226

¹⁷⁴ In GL this question centres on the relationship Balthasar sets out between a natural religious and a theological *a priori*. cf GL I 155-171; cf Dalzell: *Dramatic* 30ff; Conway: *Anonymous* 146-149; La Madrid: “Anonymous” 375f; Roland Chia: “Theological Aesthetics or Aesthetic Theology? Some Reflections on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 1996 92-94

¹⁷⁵ eg Th III 416

¹⁷⁶ Th IV 142

drama, which concedes a place to what can be called a supernatural existential, albeit with a limited but unspecific definition. Whilst Balthasar does not take up and actively develop the conceptuality used in “Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie”,¹⁷⁷ when it becomes necessary to use detailed terminology and fine distinctions it becomes evident that he still countenances a ‘supernatural modification’ of our natural openness to the absolute¹⁷⁸ distinguishable from both nature and grace. It is ‘*additional*’ to our natural finitude,¹⁷⁹ “more than a natural ‘orientation’” (and so more than just natural), and yet it is “deeply burned” into the structure of finite freedom, like a characteristic mark that abides even when grace is rejected (and is therefore distinguished from grace). Whilst he maintains that if we call this additional divine ‘summoning’ (*Angerufensein*) or ‘invitation’¹⁸⁰ a supernatural existential (which he does legitimise) we “must not seek to unpack its contents further” (in the direction of an experience of grace as mentioned above¹⁸¹), it is clearly a *supernatural* modification (in the terms of the *Theo-drama* an ‘element of the divine freedom’) persisting even under the condition of the loss of grace - a *supernatural, natural* characteristic!

It is one thing to say that in the concrete state human nature is in relationship with grace *de facto* from the first moment of creation and quite another to say that prescind from this grace there is a supernatural ‘marking’ of this nature and to establish *this* as concrete nature, as Balthasar seems to here (in the language of the *Theo-drama*: this element of divine freedom being “built into the concrete structure of finite freedom”).

So there still seems to be an ultimate concession to a triadic analysis which sustains (indeed its vagueness perhaps even aggravates) the kind of complexity which sits ill with the simplicity of the insight Balthasar attributes to de Lubac and leaves an unresolved

¹⁷⁷ in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 75 (1953) 453-461; cf chapter 1 section E above

¹⁷⁸ Th III 411

¹⁷⁹ Th IV 166

¹⁸⁰ This choice of words suggests continuity between the position expressed here in the *Theo-drama* and the early exploration of the supernatural modification where this radical elevation is also referred to as a summons (*Anruf*) in KB 291; cf chapter 1 note 88.

¹⁸¹ chapter 3 section B1 above

tension at the heart of his thought on the matter. For, as he himself argues elsewhere in the *Theo-drama*, even apart from his concerns about particular understandings of the *contents* of a supernatural existential, the notion itself is an unnecessary complication of the basic features of man's unique constitution and destiny. These can be authentically conveyed with due regard for the original position of the fathers, the insights of Thomas *and* official ecclesiastical statements of the post-reformation period when it is simply maintained that it is into "man's fundamental *creatureliness* as a conscious being" that the vocation to union with God is implanted, a vocation that he cannot fulfil of himself (the Augustinian/Thomist natural desire for the beatific vision).¹⁸² There is no need to confuse things by attributing something supernatural to this desire to know God as he is in himself.¹⁸³ As 'gift' and 'image', dependent on free inter-subjective disclosure to be ourselves and upon God's free self-disclosure to receive the absolute truth and goodness for which we are made, the paradox of this destiny out of proportion with our nature is "an integral part of the primal fact of self-consciousness".¹⁸⁴

E Finite self-transcendence and the nature-grace relationship are an image of the Trinity

Finally the mysterious balance of the bipolar structure of our freedom with its simultaneous self-transcending autonomy and absolute indebtedness (as regards both existence and fulfilment) is ultimately elucidated with reference to Balthasar's trinitarian perspective, that is his concern to uncover a reflection of the Trinity in finite processes, to find their origin in the triune life of God.

The paradox of human nature re-emphasised by de Lubac that man can only fulfil himself beyond himself (explored in the *Theo-drama* in the arena of infinite and finite freedom, divine and human action) is itself identified as an image of the Trinity. The self-transcendence of our finite free nature *exists as a reflection of the triune constitution*

¹⁸² Th III 415 Balthasar's italics.

¹⁸³ Th IV 142

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

of God¹⁸⁵ in which, for Balthasar, each divine person is himself because of his ‘transcendence’ towards the other two, the divine essence being ‘ever greater’ than each person.¹⁸⁶ It is then ultimately this trinitarian perspective that explains man’s fundamental orientation to God. It is this imaging of the self-transcendence internal to the Trinity in finite self-transcendence that is the reason why every finite being finds its meaning, direction and path “by pointing beyond itself to the unfathomable reality of God”.¹⁸⁷ Again we find the inner life of the Trinity offered to us as an explanation of specific features of human nature.

As it is nature’s simultaneous self-transcendence and radical indebtedness for both origin (being) and goal (participation in the Godhead) that is an image of the Trinity, *the nature-grace relationship itself is an imago trinitatis*.¹⁸⁸

The connection made between the interplay of nature and grace and the doctrine of the Trinity is highly distinctive. The nature-grace relationship is understood to reflect Balthasar’s novel identification of ‘expectation’ and ‘surprise’ in the love relationships of the persons of the Trinity.¹⁸⁹ In the “superabundant vitality” of the life of God, whilst each person knows and attains the others completely, there is always ‘something new’ in their exuberant love; every expectation finds ‘a fulfilment that surpasses it’.¹⁹⁰ In particular, on the basis of the creature being created pre-eminently in the Logos, it recalls a description of the Father-Son relationship, almost subordinationist in tone:

...that the Father, insofar as he is the Origin, is always greater than the Son; for the Son expresses his indebtedness to the Father (by sharing the power to breathe forth the Spirit) in that he attains the Father’s (power of) so breathing him forth.¹⁹¹

As we shall see later, Balthasar’s supreme illustration of the relationship between self-transcendent nature and the grace of God in Mary¹⁹² draws attention to the primacy of grace. In this perspective the world’s ‘philosophical’ transcendence has its basis “in

¹⁸⁵ Th V 102-105, 75, 181

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 102, 104, 497

¹⁸⁷ Adrienne von Speyr: *Das Licht und die Bilder* 17 quoted by Balthasar in Th V 103; cf also 75.

¹⁸⁸ Th V 104

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Th V 79, 89, 90, 92-93, 104, 126

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 104

¹⁹² cf Ibid. and chapter 5 section D3 below

the ‘theological’ final *prius* of grace over nature’s efficient causality.”¹⁹³ However the origin of this weighting as an *imago trinitatis* is provocative giving some kind of sovereign primacy to the Father in relation to the Son and the Spirit

Again the question is raised as to what extent Balthasar’s understanding of the Godhead suffers from his attempts to co-ordinate the creature-God relationship precisely and in detail as an image of the Trinity, and, perhaps with more relevance to our concerns here, to what effect? Is the nature-grace relationship *really* illuminated by this association? What does it tell us? That the interplay of nature and grace has a strange and mysterious relationship to the relations of the persons of the Trinity that makes God’s triunity sound rather different from the way it has traditionally been presented? Perhaps it gives us a glimpse of just how intense and intimate a *circumincessio* between nature and grace Balthasar wishes to convey, but, as we have found little emphasis on the *circumincessio* of the Trinity, this seems rather unlikely. In fact in the next chapter we will discover a tension between unity and distinction in Balthasar’s understanding of the nature-grace relationship.

¹⁹³ Th V 113

Chapter 5

Finite freedom and the nature-grace relationship

God created the world (nature) to be united with him in Christ (the supernatural order).¹

The creation-grace articulation, the positing of a non-divine subject that is to participate in the divine life, cannot be abandoned.²

A Gratuity and the nature-grace distinction

Our discussion of finite freedom in the previous chapter brought us to the threshold of its fulfilment in the infinite freedom of God. In this chapter we explicitly connect this picture of freedom with the question of the nature-grace relationship, discuss the related topic of the relationship between image and likeness before going on to focus specifically on how this finite freedom is fulfilled in infinite freedom.

The analysis of freedom described in the previous chapter is clearly crucial to Balthasar's understanding of the spiritual creature and its relation to God and, not surprisingly therefore, comes to be associated with its nature. Indeed freedom as rational spontaneity can be understood *as* the creature's nature as long as it is seen with the second dimension of openness and consent, which is integral to finitude.³ Balthasar is aware that as the bi-polar structure of finite freedom belongs so much to its nature this could be understood to imply "that there is neither reason nor space for any distinction between its nature and the realm of the "supernatural", that is what is "of grace" in the true sense."⁴ The point though is that the end and fulfilment of this freedom does not lie within the sphere of its own structure, the unity of his 'for-himself-whilst-making-room-for-others' does not find complete satisfaction of itself.

¹ Th III 482

² HDL 69 Here Balthasar is summarising part of de Lubac's argument in *Le Mystère du Surnaturel*.

³ Th II 224

⁴ Th IV 371

Here we touch the limits of philosophy. In contrast to the closed free infinitude of many philosophies,⁵ in Christianity “absolute freedom freely and sovereignly communicates itself to finite freedom; in the incarnation of Christ, it descends to a level below itself, making itself available to finite freedom as the latter’s source and final goal.”⁶ This is grace, “the reciprocal immanence of finite and infinite freedom”,⁷ which finite freedom is made for but cannot achieve for itself.

Thus Balthasar’s understanding of the constitution of finite freedom with its fundamental orientation beyond itself by no means leaves the gratuitous gift of grace obsolete, nor renders unnecessary the distinction between what is possessed by nature and the fulfilment received in the self-giving of God.

The innermost dynamism of finite freedom (which is a real desire, yearning) rediscovered by twentieth century Catholic theology and which we saw in the previous chapter remains so important in Balthasar’s perspective, is not a movement that can “in any way force the divine self-disclosure”⁸ which brings it fulfilment. As in Augustine, this yearning is a thirst for God, a plea, not a demand (as in Bainism). Moreover, Balthasar’s christocentric doctrine of creation indicates the irrelevance of such an idea of demand because “right from the outset, God had already decided to reveal and so give himself to the creature he had endowed with finite freedom”, this being “the real motive of his creation from all eternity”.⁹ If it was God’s plan from the beginning then a demand from the creature is already too late. If participation in God’s inner realm by grace is the a priori of creation then “every claim the creature may make on God—as to

⁵ In Plotinus, for example, the Spirit, the One’s “Other”, can only circle round the One whose infinite freedom is only in and for itself, so that fulfilment is likewise frustration. “Such motion alone can constitute its impulse towards its centre: it cannot coincide with the centre, for then there would be no circle; since this may not be, it whirls about it; so only can it indulge its tendency...this very motion is its eternal attainment.” *The Enneads* translated into English by Stephen Mackenna (Faber and Faber, London 1956) II, 2, 1; cf Th IV 371

⁶ Th IV 372; I 16; cf also III 458

⁷ Th IV 383

⁸ Ibid. 372

⁹ Ibid.; cf chapter 2 section A1 above

what he “should” do—is already surpassed by what he has actually done”.¹⁰ The christological articulation of the same eternal divine intention for our participation—all things are only created with a view to their being perfected in the Second Adam—does not mean that “God owes it to natural man to raise him to the state of grace; God “owes” it to himself to be faithful to the order and the consistency of his unitary world plan.”¹¹ Hence wondering about the possibility of finite freedom in the absence of such a decision on God’s part is also irrelevant. If we recall the rather involved discussion of gratuity ‘from below’ and ‘from above’ in chapter one it now seems clear here that speculation about hypothetical situations is not necessary for maintaining the gratuity of grace—or the distinction between nature and grace. The ‘concession’ to the relative significance of a pure nature concept described in chapter one does not seem to have a place here.

The distinction is between God endowing his creature with freedom and the extraordinary privilege of God “freely and sovereignly”¹² communicating himself to that creature—that fulfilling self-disclosure that the creature is impotent to compel. So the two endowments are not the same although there cannot be a harsh disjunction between them because they are both part of the one plan of God for us. Since that plan has been revealed to us we cannot see one without the other, and this is emphasised for us in the natural yearning that we have for the fulfilment in communion with God that we cannot obtain for ourselves.

Nevertheless, does this distinction between the self-bestowal of absolute freedom in addition to the initial bestowal of finite freedom mean there is need to distinguish one endowment as grace, ‘*super*’, ‘above’ the other, or is it satisfactory simply to say with Thérèse and Bernanos that “everything is grace”¹³ —after all both are the utterly free gifts of God, intrinsically related as origin and goal? Despite his affinity with Thérèse

¹⁰ Th III 47 Absolute freedom “has always anticipated finite freedom by providing it with scope within which it can fulfil itself, namely, “*en Christo*”. (III 36)

¹¹ Th III 257

¹² Th IV 372

¹³ cf Ibid. 374; 422; cf chapter 2 page 45 above.

and Bernanos, to Balthasar's mind a theological distinction has always been important, notwithstanding the fact that everything is the free gift of God. Side by side with Thérèse's acclamation comes a technical assertion:

Nature is what God freely creates, *ens ab alio*; however much grace it receives, it remains eternally nondivine, the receptive subject of God's free bestowal of grace, which enables it to participate in the divine goods.¹⁴

We must "hold fast to the distinction between nature (what distinguishes the creature from God) and supernatural vocation and endowment",¹⁵ whilst acknowledging that the former is made for the latter.

B The dualism of grace

1 Grace as gift

...given man's supernatural vocation to trinitarian love, something of the freedom granted him is "laid up" in God, ultimately to be handed over to him, in the exchange of love, as the final gift that will bring his freedom to fulfilment.¹⁶

To further explore Balthasar's determination to uphold this distinction and avoid what he refers to as a 'monism' of grace,¹⁷ we shall now look at a short but crucial section in *Theo-drama* II which is (unusually) specifically dedicated to the topic of grace,¹⁸ complementing it with a subsequent passage from the section on anthropology.¹⁹ We have already spoken of finite free being as gift;²⁰ in the section on grace to which we turn now Balthasar describes how this initial gift is only the *beginning* of a divine giving culminating in a *further* superlative gift in which the Giver gives himself. Thus the indebtedness for our very beginning is complemented by an indebtedness for our end (that is, the realisation of our yearning), and our natural receptivity is fulfilled in receiving the ultimate gift. In the face of philosophies which understand man's fulfilment as self-achieved through reaching above himself the use of this 'gift' terminology emphasises the *gratis* quality of this fulfilment.²¹

¹⁴ Ibid. 374

¹⁵ Th III 482

¹⁶ Th V 302

¹⁷ Th IV 374; II 311 note 41

¹⁸ Th II 312-316

¹⁹ Ibid. 398-402

²⁰ cf chapter 4 section B1 above

²¹ cf *Engagement with God* 25; and with reference to the loss of grace's gift quality in Kant cf Th II 421.

Firstly Balthasar speaks of the gift of creation (already familiar from our discussion of existence as gift in chapter four) in which infinite freedom imparts finite freedom. Although this finite freedom exists in itself, is not just defined in relation to infinite freedom, and looks to realise itself fully, it is, as we have seen, always a *gift*, indebted to a Giver, *in whom* it exercises its autonomy, (such that self-possession and thankfulness go hand in hand).²² Balthasar therefore clearly acknowledges the gratis quality of this fundamental gift and the fact that there is already an immanence in the divine if this gift, which is a unique image of the divine freedom, is to be used. Indeed this bestowal of freedom is itself understood to be a self-manifestation of the presence of the divine freedom. From the perspective of finite freedom this gift-quality of finite self-determining being is expressed in the ‘obligation’ to give thanks which arises (whether or not it is carried out) because its autonomy is *owed* to infinite freedom.²³

Now this gift of freedom is not final and therefore finite. It is not settled business freeing up infinite freedom so that it can concentrate on something else or itself (Deism), rather it is a constant, continuing act.²⁴ The constitution of rational free subjects on the part of divine freedom is just the first word of the message. These subjects are made to be receptive to and capable of responding to further words.²⁵ Although it is true that this first word, which gives a share in the act of real being, contains an inexhaustible message (because being (*esse*) is richer than any particular totality of entities), nevertheless “*this “richer” realm apprehended by the spiritual being does not actually fulfil but rather holds out a promise*”, removing limitations and pointing “in the direction of a realm that is limitless.”²⁶ This brings us to the unique aspect of this divine communication: the Giver of such a promise “far beyond any gift separate from himself, is able actually to give himself.”²⁷ The very characteristic of the continuing gift of freedom is that it not only produces the gift but also “proffers itself, the Giver”, thus

²² Th II 313 It is not given in such a way as to be expelled or cut off from its origin. (V 389)

²³ Th II 313

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. 398

²⁶ Ibid. (Balthasar’s italics)

offering a home, ‘right of citizenship’ in the infinite realm²⁸—the reciprocal immanence of the two freedoms, of gift and Giver. In this understanding of grace God is making both an offer of *love* and of *being* (not to be confused with some ‘thing’).²⁹

Whilst this divine self-communication is located as part of the ongoing giving of freedom, Balthasar maintains that it is *more than* the constitution of subjects: it is the opening up to them of subsistent being’s own free inner life. Indeed he makes the distinction by actually referring to the constitution of subjects as natural and the latter act as supernatural.³⁰ Like the fundamental reception of selfhood, this reception of infinite life, of participation in divinity, also images the Son’s receptivity vis-à-vis the Father from whom he too ‘receives’ Godhead and eternal freedom.³¹

If we turn to the viewpoint of finite freedom, this state of being ‘in grace’ means following through the fundamental indebted receptivity of existence in the direction of both origin *and* goal and thus also places the gift of grace and the gift of free existence in an organic relationship. Being in grace involves acknowledging that both the existence and the fulfilment of finite freedom are dependent on the divine freedom made manifest in the bestowing of freedom—without making them any the less genuine possessions of finite freedom (both are given, not lent³²). Thus *thanksgiving* comes to be understood as characteristic of the appropriate response of freedom (and the rejection of grace means a living contradiction: refusing to acknowledge personally the objective indebtedness to God for everything).³³ There is a continuous qualitative escalation in experience (corresponding to the qualitative heightening in the ongoing divine giving of freedom), such that “finite freedom will continually encounter the gift-character of the divine realm

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. 313

²⁹ Ibid. 315; *Engagement* 27 (grace as a love)

³⁰ Th II 398

³¹ Ibid. 267

³² “For what God gives, he gives absolutely and entirely, giving us the right of ownership, though everything ultimately comes from him.” Adrienne von Speyr: *Johannes vol I* 125-126 cited by Balthasar in Th V 109; *Engagement* 25

³³ cf Th II 316; *Engagement* 28

in a new and heightened way.”³⁴ This process never comes to a stand still for “the divine wellspring is always a free self-giving that renders the recipient more and more able to receive more.”³⁵

The distinctiveness of the actual gift of participation in the divine realm itself is still marked in this view from the perspective of finite freedom. First of all indebtedness for this latter gift is not simply *merged* with indebtedness for the gift of finite freedom, such that the latter gift could necessarily be derived from the primary bestowal of freedom.³⁶ That incredible gift of self-transcending freedom is not in itself sufficient to unlock the gates of fulfilment in the infinite: this access can only be freely given it by infinite freedom; it is “pure grace”. Every act that finite freedom “performs in the direction of transcendence can only be performed because the realm of infinite freedom has disclosed itself.”³⁷ What is extraordinary and quite unique about this fulfilment in the infinite for which the finite free subject is destined is the fact that he is actually taken beyond himself³⁸ and what he encounters and freely receives is the presence of the Giver himself in the gift, that is *in him*. We receive both the love of God, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, *and* the Holy Spirit himself³⁹ (who is “the hypostasis of all that is meant by “gift”⁴⁰).

This extraordinary relationship in which the divine Giver hands himself over as a genuine gift to the creature, whilst maintaining some kind of distinction between the created gift and the Infinite Giver (who can never be a ‘thing owned’ by the creature⁴¹) is

³⁴ Th II 314

³⁵ Th V 397

³⁶ “...the creature’s own freedom was always dependent, for its fulfilment, on absolute freedom. But now he is given access by God to the inner sphere of divine life, so that he may live and move in it. This is something the creature would never have dreamed of; he would never have postulated it for himself either subjectively or objectively.” Th II 400

³⁷ Ibid. 314

³⁸ Ibid. 314, 399

³⁹ “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Roms 5:5 cf Th II 230; 233; cf section below D2 below.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 287

⁴¹ Grace is not simply an identification of Giver and gift. The description ‘the presence of the Giver in the gift’ is carefully chosen, allowing Balthasar to put emphasis on the personal self-giving of God in his account of grace (the presence of the Giver) whilst also safeguarding the ‘createdness’ of what is given (a gift). Thus it cannot be said to be a case of uncreated and infinite Spirit being imparted directly to the

further elucidated by the use of the water image to denote the grace of the Holy Spirit. Balthasar quotes Ignatius of Antioch: “in me is a murmuring wellspring; it speaks to me interiorly, saying, ‘Come away to the Father’”. This, Balthasar says “is the voice of the *Kyrios* who is the Spirit and who gives us the living water that wells up to eternal life (Jn 4: 14).”⁴² This recalls a passage from *Karl Barth* in which Balthasar quotes at length from a reflection of Guardini’s on this living water.⁴³ Guardini draws attention to the fact that the well-spring of grace which “cannot be compelled by any human power” but “is God’s pure opening up to us in his sovereign freedom”,⁴⁴ is given in such a way that it springs up from *within* the finite spiritual creature. The well from which I draw the grace that comes from God alone is (miraculously!) *in me*, a creature, such that there is no contradiction between grace being Christ’s and grace being mine, between grace as God himself and grace as a created gift. As will become clearer in our description of the role of the Spirit later in this chapter, this new, abundant love is *within* because of the theonomy of the Spirit. It is not external precisely because it seizes man in the innermost depths of his person; he ‘has’ it because it possesses him.⁴⁵ A genuine realisation and expression of indebtedness is thus only possible if finite freedom acknowledges both the presence of the Giver in the gift and the fact that the infinite realm entered is one given by the Giver to whom it owes everything (and is not simply seized through its own self-transcendence).⁴⁶

creature, but the fuller and fuller opening up within the created gift already given of the self-giving of the uncreated Giver. Thus despite Balthasar’s reservations regarding “the abiding obscurity of the term ‘created grace’” (Th III 299 note 68) his description basically remains within the boundaries framed by the distinction made in Catholic theology between created and uncreated grace, although he is keen to emphasise what is given is not ‘a thing’. (Th II 315) (The description ‘created’ should not of course imply a ‘thing’, such as a ‘quantifiable’ substance poured into the ‘vessel’ of the soul. The concern behind the distinction is the difference between God and his creatures, such that we do not receive into our being God as he is in himself (his divine essence), but communion with God, the life of God in relation to us. The language of pouring and ‘infusion’ used with reference to grace is of course entirely Scriptural inspired primarily by Romans 5.5 and I Cor 12. 13, although there is of course also Jesus’ use of the image of water with reference to his gift of God’s life to us eg John 4:14. cf also Th II 315 note 2)

⁴² Th III 454-5; cf V 462 (Ruysbroeck); I 646

⁴³ KB 345-346

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ LA 108

⁴⁶ Th II 314

The distinctiveness of the gift of participation in the divine sphere is further underlined by Balthasar's acknowledgement that such a state is not necessarily universally experienced by all possessors of finite freedom, but there are different 'gradations'⁴⁷ towards the perfected instance of "absolute non-resistance to infinite freedom" and the fruitful immanence that ensues.⁴⁸ There is the person who, wishing to surrender totally to God, is 'in grace' (Balthasar is specifically referring to *sanctifying* grace here⁴⁹), although they are unable to carry out this non-resistance absolutely and the fruitfulness of their life within infinite freedom is curtailed. Secondly, the person who does not actually resist God (because they have not reached the age of reason) can also be living in receipt of this self-gift of God ('born of him') by virtue of solidarity with the Church through baptism, although whether he remains in this state is dependent on the subsequent decisions of his life. Finally there are those who to varying degrees reject the presence of the Giver of the gift in them, deny their indebtedness, and are therefore not in receipt of sanctifying grace. They do have "God's antecedent offer of love" though and are therefore still in a relation to grace, which can facilitate a positive response to the offer of divine love (prevenient and actual grace⁵⁰). However they can also harden themselves to such an extent that they hurl "a resounding No in the face of love (the 'sin against the Holy Spirit')." ⁵¹

This is the closest Balthasar gets to talking about different 'categories' of grace in the *Theo-drama*, for as the new intimacy of divine indwelling in God's personal self-giving in the creature is a relationship without analogy it is extremely "hard to distinguish the different forms of act and attitude that manifest God's grace."⁵² In fact these only have meaning in relation to the creature's finitude and in particular its sinful resistance, for it is the finite that alters its stance vis-à-vis God (moving closer or further away) not God

⁴⁷Thus there is not simply a tidy dividing line between those who 'have grace' and those who do not.

⁴⁸ Th II 315-316 Mary is this perfected instance as the description on these pages suggests (describing this non-resistance in terms of her 'Let it be done unto to me according to your word'); cf also eg Th V 104 and section D3 below.

⁴⁹ cf Introduction note 16 above

⁵⁰ cf Introduction note 16 above

⁵¹Th II 316

who changes vis-à-vis the finite. On this rare occasion when Balthasar does use the technical language for different ‘kinds’ of grace we can see that the duality of God’s giving to finite freedom that we have been describing (an initial share in being and the possibility of inner access to the life of absolute being) can be seen as a division between prevenient and actual grace on the one hand and sanctifying grace on the other: a division *within* grace—albeit nevertheless a very considerable division including on the negative side those who may be on the point of a hardened outright rejection of God’s presence. Balthasar is quite clear here in his description of the various “defective instances” of receiving God’s grace that the person who to different degrees rejects the presence of infinite grace in him does *not* have the fullness of the immanence of infinite freedom for which he is made, does not have ‘sanctifying grace’, is not adopted in a rebirth from God. However he still has grace within him, the grace that goes ahead and offers, makes available the fullness that alone fulfils and makes possible a ‘yes’ to it, a presence of grace that rests on the fact that God gives something of himself in the very act of establishing the rational free subject in being and calls and leads that free creature into a more and more intimate giving and receiving. This understanding of the distinction between those who are and are not ‘in a state of grace’⁵² as a distinction *within grace* supports the conclusion gradually emerging that Balthasar’s duality is as much a *duality of grace* as a division between nature and grace.

2 Distinction and continuity: one gift or two?

This description of the ‘two-fold’ gift of freedom means that, on the one hand, finite freedom is *always* in relation to infinite freedom on the basis of the gift of creation, and that there is a *continuity* in this giving which includes the ultimate gift (God himself), *but* that, on the other, that which is thus offered in this ongoing giving is nevertheless qualitatively distinct, as a finite thing separate from the Giver is different from the Giver’s own personal giving of himself to his creature. This is a description that

⁵² Th IV 373

emphasises the intimate, dynamic relationship between creation and grace—indeed quite radically describing them as one process of divine giving—in keeping with the understanding that grace does not annihilate or give us a completely different nature but *transforms* it as a gift that is beyond our expectations (but is not a bombshell).⁵⁴ Yet at the same time Balthasar’s description stresses the uniqueness of the gift of God’s-self. Thus over and above the gift of finite free being (which necessarily exists in infinite being), grace is described as *the presence of the Giver in the gift*⁵⁵ (complementing the description of grace as the indwelling of infinite in the finite discussed above).⁵⁶ This immanence is specifically connected with the *Holy Spirit*, “the absolute divine gift”,⁵⁷ and the person who receives this gift of being and love, having acknowledged dependence for such fulfilment, is “someone to whom it has been ‘*granted* to have life in himself’”.⁵⁸

On the one hand then this distinctive relationship of Giver to gift bears much in common with the essential relationship between the two, such that the distinction can sometimes seem to be one of degree. But on the other hand this ultimate giver-gift relationship is unique both in what (or rather who) it gives and in the fact that it is not necessary. An extract from the passage we have been considering from the theological anthropology of volume II is important here:

God undertook that *first* communication of his being, whereby finite, self-aware free beings were created, *with a view* to a ‘*second*’ act of freedom whereby he would initiate them into the mysteries of his own life and freely fulfil the *promise latent* in the infinite act that realises Being.⁵⁹

This clearly indicates how Balthasar continues to maintain both the *dynamic link* between the two forms of God’s ‘self-giving’ and their *distinction* as two distinguishable acts of divine freedom. (When this distinction is considered ‘from below’ it is conveyed

⁵³ This phrase is understood in the sense in which it is normally used to refer to a perseverance in the sanctifying grace received in baptism.

⁵⁴ cf Th V 380

⁵⁵ Th II 314, 315 In Jesus there is no tension between Giver and gift. cf H 52

⁵⁶ section A above and chapter 4 section C1 and 2.

⁵⁷ Th II 315, 233, 287; V 65, 381

⁵⁸ Th III 35-36

⁵⁹ Th II 400-401 (my italics)

by the fact that participation in being is necessary, the gift of existence non-negotiable, whereas ‘grace’, encountering the presence of the Giver in the gift, is not.⁶⁰)

We need to be clear however that the distinction between the two divine acts is not necessarily a temporal one.⁶¹ Indeed in the section entitled ‘Grace’ that we have been looking at in particular, more than in the passage just cited (with its explicit ‘first’ and ‘second’ communication and use of temporal phrases with reference to the latter⁶²), there is a strong sense of the simultaneity of the gift of freedom and the self-giving of the Giver in the gift (however qualitatively distinct and however much one is not derivative of the other). Here divine freedom is described as manifesting its presence *in the very act of bestowing finite freedom*, and the characteristic of this bestowal is that it proffers the Giver as well as producing the gift.⁶³ Even though in his *explicit* reference to ‘two’ acts (in the passage quoted immediately above) he is careful to put inverted commas around ‘second’, ultimately it is difficult to reconcile the deep, important awareness of the simultaneity of giving always ordained by God with the strong, underlying sense of a first and second act/gift, implying a double gratuity, ie *two* gratuitous gifts, two ‘unowednesses’⁶⁴ and thus two responses.⁶⁵ This contrasts with his emphasis on the priority of the gracious salvific divine intention which seems to suggest one total gift and one gratuity.⁶⁶ The emphasis on the unity of gift coheres with his enduring emphasis on the *de facto* unity of nature and grace encountered in *Karl Barth* and on the

⁶⁰ Ibid. 314

⁶¹ Ibid. 401

⁶² Ibid. 400-401 (Nevertheless, it is also here that the non-temporal aspect of the distinction is made explicit.)

⁶³ Ibid. 313

⁶⁴ eg the passage from Bérulle quoted on Th II 289 which refers to the fact “that we are doubly indebted to God”.

⁶⁵ Our reception/affirmation of the fundamental gift of self is described as the perfect response of thanksgiving (Th II 287 cf chapter four section B1 above) and one that is ongoing, “a lifelong task” (II 290)—is this *continuous* with the response to ‘the presence of the Giver in the gift’ or should we speak of *two* thanksgivings?

⁶⁶ eg “The final cause, since it is the first and all-embracing cause, includes all the articulations of the efficient cause...To that extent, any ‘claim’ the creature might make on God (assuming the word has any meaning) would always come too late, in view of the total gift already made and the response expected, namely, total gratitude.” Th II 401; cf 277 This outlook is consistent with his christocentric doctrine of creation in which all things are made to be perfected in Christ. cf IV 372; section A above; chapter 2 section A1; chapter 3 section C.

establishment of man in grace from the first moment of his existence, as well as the radical gratuity of divine love apparent in the *Theo-drama* that simply creates everything ‘for nothing’.⁶⁷ On the other hand the emphasis on distinct gifts bears the mark of his enduring interest in paradox and the awareness of the *discontinuity* between the nature of man and his end in grace. However a clear coherence between these two different aspects of his thought on the subject is less than transparent. Whilst one can argue that it is possible to maintain simultaneously that “everything is gift” (“everything is grace”) but that not all the gifts are the same, nevertheless the relationship and distinction between gifts should still exhibit an identifiable coherence. We shall return to this crucial issue when we make our conclusions after we have treated all the various aspects of this topic.

3 Support for dualism of gift from the tradition

Balthasar locates the decisive struggle between a monism or dualism of grace in the Augustine-Pelagius debate,⁶⁸ but denies that the origin of a dualism lies here, maintaining rather the existence of a clear distinction of the two areas right from the beginning. He points to a few patristic sources, for example Tertullian’s contrasting of *facere* (to create), which he uses with reference to the substance of the creature, and *condere* (to form, establish), which he uses with reference to grace,⁶⁹ also citing his understanding of divine grace as more powerful than nature’s freedom which underlies it.⁷⁰ He mentions Cyril of Jerusalem’s teaching that we are children of God, not by nature, but by adoption, that is by grace⁷¹ and notes that the “‘divinization’ so extolled by the Greek Fathers is always the result of a grace that is rigorously distinguished from nature, a

⁶⁷ cf Th II 260

⁶⁸ He makes close use of Gisbert Greshake: *Gnade der konkreten Freiheit. Eine Untersuchung zur Gnadenlehre des Pelagius* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1972), although distancing himself from Greshake’s main thesis. cf Th IV 374 note 20

⁶⁹ *Against Marcion* 5 17 in *Patrologia Latina* 2 514C (English translation in: Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds.: *Ante Nicene Fathers* III (Hendrickson, Massachusetts 1995) 466)

⁷⁰ “...the power of divine grace, more potent than nature, exercising its sway over the underlying faculty of free will in us.” *De Anima* 21 in *Patrologia Latina* 2 727 (*A treatise on the Soul* 21 in Roberts and James Donaldson, eds.: *Ante Nicene* 202)

⁷¹ *3rd Catechesis* paragraph 14 in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* VII (Parker, Oxford 1894) 17

grace that elevates us to a ‘super-natural dignity’”.⁷² We could also mention here the traditional distinction between ‘*datum*’ and ‘*donum*’⁷³ (although of course Balthasar is concerned that the datum of creation is itself understood to be a gift) and the patristic articulation of image and likeness, which we will consider in the next section of this chapter.

His use of the Augustine-Pelagius debate perhaps comes across as more heartfelt. He understands Pelagius’ position to be one in which “all forms of grace can be traced back to a single form, namely, God’s gift of finite freedom and his maintenance of it”.⁷⁴ His “whole understanding of grace (in creation and redemption) centres on the primary gift of freedom to the creature in the original act of creation” so “specifically Christian grace is always given solely in order to re-establish and strengthen man’s original freedom.” The theology of creation is therefore dominant, and the perspective ultimately anthropocentric, rather than christocentric.⁷⁵ In Augustine’s love-centred perspective “freedom, in its full sense, only exists in personal participation in absolute love”. This presupposes that

such sharing in the inner fullness of God’s love is distinct from the creation and gift of a natural, free power to choose. For Augustine, it is this sharing that constitutes grace in the full sense, however free and gracious creation itself may have been.⁷⁶

Pelagius therefore fails to recognise this radical newness of the grace of participation offered in Christ over and above the grace of creation. Accordingly the influence of Christ remains for him at the level of *exemplum* only, such that there is discipleship and imitation but not a mystical inter-penetration or identity, there is *exemplum* but no *sacramentum* making us inwardly the members of Christ.⁷⁷ Whilst recognising the harmony of this twofold work, Augustine clearly distinguishes the fact that Christ’s death and resurrection gives an example for the outer man (“*exterioris exemplum*”) and

⁷² *hyper physin axioma* (a dignity beyond the natural) Cyril of Alexandria *In Joh.* I, 9 (PG 73, 153) Th IV 375

⁷³ cf HDL 69-70; McGrath: *Iustitia* 101

⁷⁴ Th IV 378

⁷⁵ Ibid. 376-7

⁷⁶ Th IV 378 Balthasar acclaims this insight of Augustine’s despite acknowledging that his formulation was sometimes one-sided (eg II 232; IV 380) and that later interpretations created further distortions (Luther, Jansen). II 234

the fact that it works upon the inner man (*“interioris hominis sacramentum”*, *“sacramentum interioris resurrectionis”*), renewing him inwardly “in order that he may dwell in the holy mountain of God who speaks the truth in his heart”.⁷⁸ Likewise, Balthasar maintains that an understanding of ethical approximation to Christ requires some connection with the ontic question of the creation-God relation. Whilst Pelagius correctly recognises that this dramatic relationship is presupposed by the gift of freedom to the creature (which constitutes him as the image of God), Balthasar emphasises that this “cannot be *more* than the precondition for inner participation in the essence of God, that is, in the vibrant, divine love-life of the Trinity.”⁷⁹

So within the overall context of the primal gift (creation) always being made for the gift of the Creator’s self-bestowal, Balthasar understands the latter gift as qualitatively higher than the former and the former as the precondition of the latter. The gift of the ability to choose freely, and the gift of rationality, are integral to the nature of the spiritual creature; the grace of the bestowal of absolute freedom is not. We must recognise how the gift of “personal participation in absolute love” infinitely surpasses any other gift of God and cannot therefore merely be seen as a mere development of the primal gift as though subsumed into it, for it is something new and unheard of. But this does not deprive the primal gift of significance; it is the necessary precondition of the latter gift, “the receptive subject” of grace, enabled by grace to participate in the divine goods.⁸⁰ Indeed without the gifts integral to the spiritual creature’s nature (that is “the ability to make free decisions...just as much as its reason”) “it could neither understand nor spiritually receive God’s self-giving.”⁸¹ Moreover, the receptive subject retains significance in all the categories Balthasar uses because it is there that the fundamental

⁷⁷ Th IV 377, 379

⁷⁸ *The Trinity* IV 3 para 6 in *The Fathers of the Church* Volume 45, translated into English by Stephen McKenna, C.S.S.R (The Catholic University of America Press, Inc. 1981) (*Patrologia Latina* 42 891)

⁷⁹ Ibid. 380

⁸⁰ Ibid. 374; cf III 341 (The created order is seen as the foundation of the order of the incarnation); I 125 (The created world is seen as a presupposition of revelation); LA 102; HDL 69.

⁸¹ Th IV 374

non-divinity, the distinction from God lies, a distinction which is of course so essential if at the level of communion with God notions of confusion are, not only denied, but ruled out from the start.⁸² This avoidance of understanding participatory grace as *identity* (so much an anathema to Balthasar's perspective under the analogy of being) whilst appreciating the extraordinarily intimate nature of the communion to which we are destined is also important in the choice of spousal language to describe human communion with God.⁸³ We shall make our final comments about continuity and distinction in Balthasar's understanding of the relationship between the gift of creation and the gift of grace in the Conclusion. To fully appreciate Balthasar's understanding we need to look at his description of the relation between image and likeness and idea and prototype, before we go on to consider in more detail how given finite freedom (the first gift) finds fulfilment in the self-giving of infinite freedom.

C Image and likeness; *Abbild* and *Urbild*

1 Nature and supernature in the image-likeness relationship

Having seen the centrality of *imago dei* to the *analogia entis*, we also found the gift character of existence understood as image,⁸⁴ and encountered it specifically as an *imago trinitatis* in finite freedom.

According to the bi-polar understanding of finite freedom the first pole, *autexousion*, is posited as the prime datum and then this freedom, having been thus given, has to "realise itself, within the overall context of divine freedom."⁸⁵ Balthasar concludes that many of the Fathers found this same duality of datum and realisation expressed in

⁸² It is *nature* that is precisely that which is *not God* ("what distinguishes the creature from God") which is to be *united with God* in Christ (*supernatural order*). cf Th III 482

⁸³ This thus emphasises an intimate union without loss or confusion of the distinct identities, the bond being dependent on this distinction. cf *Church and World* (Herder and Herder, New York 1967) 126ff This coheres with the importance of the intersubjective path in Balthasar's perspective, the interpersonal community of man-woman being seen as necessary to having a relationship with God. (V 473).

The use of this primarily christological nuptial imagery ("the mystery of marriage is great only because of the relation to Christ and the Church" V 472) to describe the individual's communion with God is not dominant in the *Theo-drama* (although cf Th II 330): it tends rather to be drawn upon in Marian/ecclesial contexts and in the development of the significance of gender. cf the mariology and ecclesiology of Th III (especially 283-288 and 339-360) and V 470ff; 505f

⁸⁴ Th IV 142; cf chapter 4 section B1 above

Genesis's 'image and likeness.'⁸⁶ Thus a *distinction* and a *dynamic relation* is identified between the terms: "the '*imago*' has been created for the sake of the '*similitudo*'";⁸⁷ it is the presupposition of man's development towards likeness,⁸⁸ the datum whose likeness to God must be realised by movement toward Him.⁸⁹ Importantly from his patristic analysis the possibility emerges of actually

defining the image of God in man as finite freedom (which is naturally only conceivable in a rational nature) and locating it in the essence of this freedom.⁹⁰

It must then act accordingly, choosing to move either towards or away from God (thus realising or losing the likeness). In Balthasar's *Theo-drama* the image comes to be identified with finite freedom.⁹¹

This patristic understanding of the relationship between image and likeness reveals a

distinction between an essential constituent of man's nature, which cannot be lost even in the sinner (Irenaeus defines it as "body-soul" and as the initially hidden image of the Logos), and the gift of the Pneuma (grace), which gives man a true likeness to God and which can be lost.⁹²

Thus whilst the Fathers do not make a modern technical distinction between nature and supernature, to do so is an authentic development in keeping with their analysis, according to which image is both an essential constituent of man's nature and in a special relationship with God of copy to original (specifically in a copy-original relation to the

⁸⁵ Th II 215

⁸⁶ Ibid 215, cf especially the excursus 316-334; also V 113f

⁸⁷ Th III 527

⁸⁸ Th IV 380; cf III 525

⁸⁹ Th II 327

⁹⁰ Ibid. cf Tertullian: *Against Marcion* 2 6; 5 5; 9 4 in *Ante Nicene Fathers* III (Hendrickson, Massachusetts 1995); Henri Crouzel: *Origen* translated by A S Worrall (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1989) 95-6

⁹¹ Th III 482-3; IV 380; II 223 (with reference to Bernard of Clairvaux cf *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 81, 6 in Samuel J Eales, ed.: *The Life and Works of St Bernard* IV (John Hodges, London 1896)); II 234-5 (Gregory of Nyssa cf chapter four section C1 above); III 483; (For the association of freedom and rationality as the image cf IV 165; II 223 note 37, 397, 398)

⁹² Th II 325, cf 324

In times past it was said that man was created after the image of God, but it was not [actually] shown; for the Word was as yet invisible, after whose image man was created. Wherefore also he did easily lose the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, he confirmed both these: for he both showed forth the image truly, since he became himself what was his image; and he re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word."

Irenaeus: *Against Heresies* in *The Writings of Irenaeus* Volume II (translated into English by Alexander Roberts and W H Rambaut (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1869) V, 16, 2; cf also V, 6, 1; Volume I (1868) III, 18, 1. Balthasar finds this perspective recurring, for instance, in Basil and Maximus, whilst Tertullian, Ambrose, Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa see image and likeness as a unity and Origen adopts both perspectives. cf II 327-328

Son) which is to be deepened and perfected towards faithful likeness. Thus it can be rightly understood (in the terminology of later theology) to have both a natural and a supernatural element.⁹³

We must be clear that this is not a crude identification of image with nature and likeness with supernature.⁹⁴ It is not simply that man is created in the *image* and must move towards *likeness*. He is created in the image *and* the likeness of God, but this unique characteristic contains both a static element and a dynamic element which can be realised or lost, (just as man's nature is created in grace with a supernatural destiny—not a 'pure nature', somehow 'neutral' to God—, and this state can be perfected or lost). Thus the analysis of man's image character into natural and supernatural does not make the former a "self-subsistent rational nature", unrelated to God. On the contrary the relation of image to original is the *datum* of human consciousness: but it is not closed and complete, but is open—to realisation through the irradiation of divine light. There is, as it were, the inchoate image of the first Adam with both the static essential being and "its active fulfilment through choices in accordance with God's will", and an image only fully unveiled in the second Adam, restoring the first image and bringing about its self-transcendence to a completely unanticipated likeness to God.⁹⁵

Following the patristic recognition that it is in fact Christ who is the true image,⁹⁶ Balthasar develops a specifically christological understanding of this. In Christ we are brought face to face with the authentic image of God; he is man's normative image⁹⁷ and in him we find the true archetype of every human being⁹⁸ to which each is to be conformed. As the image of infinite freedom within the Godhead, the eternal Son lays

⁹³ Ibid. 325 including note 33

⁹⁴ cf Ibid. 332 note 56 and 33.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 326

⁹⁶ following Colossians 1: 15; "The Son is the natural image of the Father" and "man is God's image by imitation" John Damascene: *De imaginibus* or 3, 18 and 20 in *Patrologia Graeca* 94, 1340A, D; cf Irenaeus in note 92 above; as regards Origen cf Crouzel: *Origen* 93.

⁹⁷ Th II 417

⁹⁸ Th III 258

the foundation in him for the images of finite creatures and provides the infinite prototype for the assimilation of finite freedom to infinite freedom.⁹⁹

The ultimate distinction then in the unfolding of the human vocation understood in terms of image and likeness is clearly “between the ineradicable nondivinity of the creaturely ‘image’ and its vocation to participate in the divine prototype (‘likeness’),”¹⁰⁰ a union which we shall see is brought about by the ascent of the image within the descent of the prototype who indwells the copy and stamps it once and for all with his divine form.¹⁰¹ So here the significance of the natural non-divine subject, called to share in the divine, is seen in terms of the creaturely image which “has been created for the sake of the ‘*similitudo*’, not in order to develop toward it by its own self-perfection or through a dialectical process, but to *serve as a place where* the divine Archetype [*Urbild*] can be implanted.”¹⁰² Thus this understanding of the role of the created image, of creaturely freedom, as the receptive locus of divine action, again distinguishes natural and supernatural but also implies their inter-penetration. For it means that the *imago* is not simply the foundation on which the *similitudo* is built in an entirely different style, “rather it is created man, as the conscious subject he is, who is given *his* true purpose in the divine, triune life.”¹⁰³

2 Idea and prototype

Another important aspect in the christological constellation of image, likeness, copy and archetype, is Balthasar’s use of the term ‘idea’.

To different degrees and under the *analogia entis*, creation exhibits images of God. However in accordance with the christocentric doctrine of creation, the concrete relationship between the worldly copies (*Abbilder*) and the original model (*die Urbilder*) is only to be found in “the authentic, primal archetype or idea of every human being in the incarnate, crucified and risen Son, who as such is the primal idea of God, mediating

⁹⁹ Th II 330

¹⁰⁰ Th IV 380

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 381; II 330

¹⁰² Th III 527 (my italics)

all creation”¹⁰⁴ and who contains the ideas of all the individual creatures and is “the one idea that embraces, facilitates and fulfils everything else”.¹⁰⁵ Thus the creature’s proper relationship with God is mediated through the exemplary idea of each individual finite freedom contained in Christ,¹⁰⁶ who in his incarnation reveals the world’s exemplary idea in definitive concrete form.¹⁰⁷

The creature’s ‘idea’ is his prototype or blueprint (*Urbild, Leitidee*), freely set before him by God¹⁰⁸ in the Son (the one primal Idea), who is the “unchangeably valid blueprint” governing individuals, their destinies and every situation in the world and in history.¹⁰⁹ It is a ‘model’ which seems to embrace both universal (what it is to be a human being) and particular characteristics (my mission or vocation). It is God’s will for the individual creature in entirety, and from God’s perspective creatures are seen in accordance with this idea.¹¹⁰ This idea is infinite because it is nothing other than the will of God for the creature. It “lies in infinite Will, that is, it is nothing created but an aspect of God himself”.¹¹¹

This conception, like that of image-likeness, is dynamic, there being a progression towards a relationship of identity between each finite freedom and the idea held for it in God.¹¹² This dynamic relationship again expresses the *paradoxical* nature of man who as he searches cannot find fulfilment in anything worldly because his perfection lies in an assimilation to the likeness of God himself, yet he is unable by his own capacities to achieve this conformity to his ‘idea’. Man is thus ‘a search’ by nature¹¹³ including a reflection on the ‘image’, which is necessarily a reflection on the personality of the

¹⁰³ Ibid. 528

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Th II 266, cf 261; IV 330

¹⁰⁶ Th II 302-303, cf also 266; 291

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 270

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 397

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 277; Balthasar’s understanding of the relationship between the person and his prototype in the Son is influenced by Gustav Siewerth’s notion of an ‘exemplary identity’ mediated by the creature-Creator analogy. cf Ibid. 270; 21-22

¹¹⁰ Th II 302; cf 307

¹¹¹ Ibid. 304 As with the Areopagite, “the ideas are essentially the ‘divine acts of will’ (*theia thelemata*).” V 392; cf V 450 (Tauler)

¹¹² eg Th II 291; 270; For his discussion of the ‘gap’ between idea and reality cf V 385ff

prototype himself, (again rendering an elevating supernatural existential unnecessary, even though what is implicit in this reflection can only be brought into the clarity of consciousness by grace.¹¹⁴) Our creaturely mode is not destroyed in our assimilation to our idea in God, but is transcended, again recalling the axiom that grace does not destroy but perfects nature.¹¹⁵

There is obviously a relation to the platonic doctrine of the divine ideas, taken up by the Fathers (especially Augustine and Maximus) who saw in them “the archetypes of things that can be, are being and have been created as they exist in the Spirit of the Creator”,¹¹⁶ and also by the Scholastics who concerned themselves with the relationship between the archetype and the created reality, alternating between a platonic preference for the thing’s idea and a Christian recognition of the positivity of created reality. In this context Balthasar is quite clear that the latter cannot be understood as something that has fallen from the heaven of Ideas down to the earth.¹¹⁷ Nor does he accept the rigid opposition between the fullness of the idea and the self-realisation of the creature arising from the platonic preference for the divine idea,¹¹⁸ or the tendency of the platonic mysticism of the German middle ages to transcend the static archetype that confronts the creature in the direction of a “ground” in which all dissimilarity is surpassed.¹¹⁹ Instead, he favours the reciprocal movement between, and ultimate identity of, idea and real individuality understood christocentrically (by virtue of the creature-Creator union in his person) first suggested by Scotus Erigena. He elucidates this specifically with reference to his doctrine of the relationship between the world and the Trinity, in which everything in the created world shot through with *potentiality* is found *positively* in God—and that includes my freedom and my ‘I’.¹²⁰ As we have already mentioned, for Balthasar the idea *is* infinite and uncreated. However this is because it is grounded in the

¹¹³ Th IV 142; III 416-7

¹¹⁴ Th III 417

¹¹⁵ Th V 400

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 385

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 386

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 385ff; cf I 546-553

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 387-388

will, the freedom of God, the profound abyss of divine freedom. It does not have an independent existence in God, independent from his freedom.¹²¹ Thus the idea is infinite by virtue of its relation to and in God, specifically in the Son.¹²²

The key to the relationship and distinction between his perspective and that of other philosophical models lies not only in the influence of the fathers (especially Maximus' logoi-Logos relationship¹²³) and the medievals, but also in his recourse to the nineteenth century Tübingen theologian, Staudenmaier, in distinguishing his position from that of Schleiermacher, whose christological exemplary prototype is simply one of moral example, dominated by a Kantian interpretation of *Urbild* as nonreal idea.¹²⁴

Whilst acknowledging the influence of Schleiermacher's *Einheit* on Staudenmaier, Balthasar uses Staudenmaier's revitalisation of the patristic regard for image and likeness in the context of his own day (that of Hegel, Schelling, Günther and the Tübingen school) as a model for his own contemporary presentation.¹²⁵ For Staudenmaier the divine idea is God's eternal design in his knowing and willing, his 'thought' of the creature.¹²⁶ Like Balthasar he is concerned with the correspondence between divine idea and created reality and whilst in opposition to Hegel this eternal design and the concretely created world are clearly distinguished, they are seen as inseparable. We can see his influence on Balthasar in a passage in which Balthasar himself describes Staudenmaier's approach (close to Gregory of Nyssa's):

Just as the idea outlines in advance the entire history of the Son's Incarnation and of his Church, it also contains the individual ideas of each qualitatively unique personality, which is "a distinctive thought on the part of the divinity", for which each individual must strive as he is inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Ibid. 388ff

¹²¹ Th II 397, 261; V 391 It coincides with the divine nature because its being is in God.

¹²² Th II 308, 307

¹²³ cf eg Th III 258; V 385 note 1

¹²⁴ cf Th III 71ff

¹²⁵ Th II 331f, 306 note 29; III 208. Balthasar lists Staudenmaier, along with Barth and Brunner, as the only modern dogmatic theologians to give due attention to the theology of the *imago Dei* Th II 317. For an introduction to the thought of Staudenmaier cf Donald J Dietrich: *The Goethezeit and the Metamorphosis of Catholic Theology in the Age of Idealism* (Peter Lang, Berne, 1979).

¹²⁶ Th II 331

¹²⁷ Ibid.

This takes place within the embracing totality of the Idea into which a man is inserted by the Holy Spirit. On the basis of the total Idea, nature and supernatural vocation can be seen in complete unity so that through the work of the Spirit the process of likening aims toward the “supernatural” image, originally perfect, lying in the fullness of Christ. His focus, like Balthasar’s, is on the concrete idea of creation in Christ and thus the postulate of a purely natural goal is not of any significance in his doctrine of the concrete real ideas, as we saw Balthasar maintain is the case in the great scholastics.¹²⁸ It is this concrete idea that provides the “living medium within which finite freedom is able to pursue its destiny”¹²⁹ and authentic personhood comes from God alone, together with eternal destiny and the strength to achieve it.

3 The inter-subjective perspective on ‘idea’

Balthasar’s offering of a contemporary presentation of the idea-Prototype relationship using person-centred and dramatic categories is evident in his description of the distribution of role and mission, that is personhood, from the christological centre (which we describe in detail in chapter seven) and also in his use of I-thou models to set out the necessarily inter-subjective nature of self-possession and to show that the ‘thou’ conferred by the other is ultimately that conferred by God. Here the idea-Idea relation is presented in terms of the fact that the finite freedom willed by God, God has a particular will for. Although the ‘image’ of the identity enjoyed by divine freedom and divine being, impressed onto finite freedom like a watermark (in virtue of which it can be freedom) begins to become visible when finite freedom responds to being addressed as ‘thou’ by affirming itself, it is only brought to perfection when it becomes “‘thou’ in God’s sight in its fully divine, absolute manner, when it has become identical with the ‘idea’ reserved for the finite ‘thou’ within the infinite ‘Thou’, within the eternal Word

¹²⁸ cf chapter 1 above

¹²⁹ Th II 332

and Son”.¹³⁰ It is when the Logos-made-man addresses the individual that he is given insight into and access to God’s idea for him.¹³¹

The exemplary prototype of finite freedom “in Christ” is that “place” where we participate in his eternal Sonship (Eph 1:5; Rom 8:17) as “sons”: there each of us is a unique “thou” in the eternal “Thou”.¹³²

From our side the dynamic process means offering thanks in terms of response [*Ant-Wort*], by “progressively incarnating the word of thanks in our lives”.¹³³ This is the copy’s (*Abbild*) realisation of the definitive model [*Vorbild*] shown by the infinite prototype [*Urbild*]. It is thus that finite freedom truly participates in infinite freedom. Later in this chapter¹³⁴ we will complete our understanding of the receiving of and assimilation to our own idea in terms of our insertion into the process whereby we are born of God in relation to the eternal generation of the primal Prototype from the Father.

4 ‘Idea’ and the relationship between particularity and communion

Whilst Balthasar’s understanding of idea bears some relationship to Stoic and Platonic models as regards form, he gives it a new, distinctively Christian trinitarian content. This lies in the identification of the primal Idea with the *eternal Son*, the absolute ‘thou’ of the Father, (and so in the difference that there is in the one God), and in the fact (grounded in this difference) that God freely wills the creation of each particular finite subject. Thus notions of predetermination are guarded against, ‘space’ for free particularity is upheld and entirely new possibilities for understanding participation in God and the relationship between different individuals in this participation are opened up.¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Th II 291

¹³¹ Th V 391

¹³² Th II 291

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Section E below

¹³⁵ cf Th II 277-278, 283, 302, 310-311

In keeping with the idea of Christ as concrete universal,¹³⁶ the enclosure of all ideas in the primal Idea of the Son is not a stifling loss of particularity. The *all-embracing* characteristic of the Idea is precisely a superabundant *comprehensiveness* that integrates particularity without interfering with its freedom.¹³⁷ In fact uniqueness is enhanced,¹³⁸ because the Son, with his infinite divine freedom, gives a unique participation in his own uniqueness, multiplying inexhaustibly what is once-for-all and unique. Our interpersonal difference then, our particularity, is distinguished by the Son's divine, unique hypostatic difference (and so intra-mundane difference is again grounded in the hypostatic distinctiveness of the Son). Nevertheless the unity of this plurality is maintained in the Son: the distinct personal 'ideas' being "as facets of the one, total Idea"¹³⁹ and the unity of the divine will being preserved.

For Balthasar the intensified *uniqueness* that belongs to assimilation to our idea goes hand in hand with intensified *communion* (with God and one another).¹⁴⁰ Opening-up to the Prototype means opening to everything that shares in being. So both particular and universal reach unknown heights, the former, now more than an individual, is "the giving of a name that is unique in each case"¹⁴¹ (that is, personhood) and the latter "a fellowship among these unique individuals" (the communion of the Church, that is *communio* in the Spirit¹⁴²). This key development of role and person will be our subject matter in chapter seven.

5 Summary conclusion

Balthasar's use of the patristic model of image and likeness then is another example of a retrieval on Balthasar's part which is not uncritical or lacking in original development. He has opted for the tradition that distinguishes image and likeness and uses those thinkers who have a specifically christological focus. He has used Maximus in a post-

¹³⁶ cf chapter 2 section D above

¹³⁷ Th II 278; cf 302

¹³⁸ Ibid. 270

¹³⁹ Ibid. 302

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 270f

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 283

enlightenment context with the help of Staudenmaier. He rejects a straightforward adoption of the patristic treatment of image and likeness because in a contemporary context their distinction between nature and supernature is basically inadequate. As well as making distinctions between different Church Fathers on this point, it is, as Balthasar outlines in *Love Alone the Way of Revelation*, a broad characteristic basically belonging to the whole period. This is simply because the world view of the age in which the Fathers wrote did not make the kind of distinction (between philosophy and theology, nature and supernature) that has become necessary as world views and understandings of the place of theology and philosophy have developed across the ages (even though the understandable, but artificial, separation of the two in neo-scholasticism is greatly mistaken).¹⁴³ For Balthasar the way forward is not a return to the patristic models but their development today in terms of an authentic understanding of *freedom*.

D Freedom and self-surrender: the fulfilment of human freedom in divine freedom

Only in the teaching of Jesus and the post-Easter mediation upon it in the light of the Holy Spirit does the womb of the Father's divine freedom open so wide and so deep that we begin to suspect what "the fulfilment of finite freedom in infinite freedom" might mean.¹⁴⁴

Balthasar thinks that the kind of revitalising of the Father's and high scholasticism's concern for the dynamic aspect of likeness as man's assimilation to the image undertaken by Staudenmaier needs to be presented today "in terms of finite freedom's nonheteronomy within the absolute character of infinite freedom."¹⁴⁵ This brings us back to the bi-polar structure of finite freedom. Now, specifically, we consider *how* it finds fulfilment in a dimension beyond itself, that is in complete dependency on infinite freedom to communicate itself, as happens in the incarnation.¹⁴⁶ The choice over which

¹⁴² Ibid. 301

¹⁴³ cf chapter 4 note 5 above

¹⁴⁴ Th II 229

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 333

¹⁴⁶ Th IV 372

path to follow to realise its freedom is its own,¹⁴⁷ but the actual imparting of infinite freedom necessary for finite freedom's true fulfilment is clearly not in the power of finite freedom. As we have seen, the grace of "the freely given indwelling of infinite freedom in finite freedom"¹⁴⁸ in which fulfilment lies can only come as the result of a self-disclosure on the part of infinite freedom, an idea not totally alien to finite freedom because in its own social interchange the freedom of the other cannot be appropriated but "must disclose itself by opening up its own inner area."¹⁴⁹ This situation of *being created to receive* absolute goodness and truth, but *completely unable to instigate* the disclosure of this goal is an expression of that same fundamental paradox of man's nature that we have already encountered, that is, of being made for a goal out of proportion with his own natural capacities.¹⁵⁰ Ultimately then the openness of the second pole must become *consent, surrender* to the divine initiative; and contrary to what might have been expected, far from being contradictory to autonomy, to the self-determination of the first pole, surrender is in fact necessary to its fulfilment and involves no compulsion, no contradiction or alienation of the given self-possession of finite freedom.

1 The mediation of the christological paradox

However, it is uniquely from God's revelation in Christ that we learn of the compatibility of true freedom and self-surrender, of the theonomy we mentioned at the end of our analysis of the two poles of finite freedom in the previous chapter. Even in the Old Testament covenant relationship of the divine and human freedom heteronomy is apparent.

It is only from the New Testament that we learn of that perfect Epitome in whom finite freedom indwells absolute freedom. (For until the New Testament, the impression persisted that the Law—and hence the divine Will—was external to created reality.) The infinite, divine Will is given final, concrete form in the unique human figure of Jesus Christ¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Th II 285, 223-4, 232

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 232

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 228

¹⁵⁰ Th IV 142; III 417

¹⁵¹ Th III 18; II 229.

and the problem of the relationship of finite and infinite freedom is uniquely solved in the mediation of the christological paradox preserved in the chalcedonian definition. Whilst philosophical attempts to conceive of a fulfilment of finite freedom in infinite freedom cannot overcome the problem that this must inevitably involve a merging of one with the other, finite freedom becoming ‘lost’ in the infinite, even the Old Testament Covenant does not fully resolve the issue either. The *joining* of finite and infinite freedom in the old covenant is not a *full* participation, rather it *points towards* this fulfilment. For the freedom in which the commandments are to be fulfilled perfectly can only be realised within infinite freedom itself, that is through the implantation of the Spirit in the hearts of the finite covenant partners. This ultimate immediacy is attained by the covenant undergoing mediation through what Balthasar refers to as “the christological paradox, according to which without confusing the freedoms (*asunchutos*, in the chalcedonian expression), infinite freedom indwells finite freedom, and so the finite is perfected in the infinite, without the infinite losing itself in the finite or the finite in the infinite.”¹⁵² Thus, just as we have seen the nature-grace relationship focused on the relationship of human and divine in Christ, now we find crucially (influenced by Maximus the Confessor’s understanding of divine-human reciprocity¹⁵³) “the entire theo-drama has its centre in the two wills of Christ, the infinite, divine will and the finite, human will”.¹⁵⁴ This is “the reciprocal immanence of finite and infinite

¹⁵² Th II 201 Balthasar refers later to the heightened sense of drama: “God no longer deals with man from without but—by becoming man—from within man...” IV 60; cf also LA 60, 85; *Engagement* 21, 37

¹⁵³ This is “a characteristic feature of Maximus’ theology” according to Lars Thunberg: *Microcosm and Mediator The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (CWK Gleerup & Ejnar Munksgaard, Lund 1965) 134. Both Thunberg (32f, 134, 453, 457) and Balthasar focus on the following passage from *Ambigua* 10 in P Sherwood: *The Early Ambigua of St Maximus the Confessor* (Rome, 1955):

God and man are exemplars (*paradeigmata*) one of another; God makes himself man for man’s sake out of love, so far as man, enabled by God through charity, deified himself; and man is rapt up by God in mind to the unknowable, so far as man has manifested through virtues the God by nature invisible.

A detailed study of Balthasar’s appreciation of the importance of chalcedonian christology for Maximus’s theology can be found in Cyril O’Regan “Von Balthasar and Thick Retrieval: Post-Chalcedonian Symphonic Theology” *Gregorianum* 77 1996 227-260 esp 240, 247, 259.

¹⁵⁴ Th II 201, cf also 63, 196; IV 380; V 276, 410, 412, 446, 453, 466. Hence the importance of the *heart* of Christ cf Th III 243f.

freedom”¹⁵⁵; “the encounter and reciprocal inter-penetration that takes place here...is the climax of the relationship between infinite and finite”,¹⁵⁶ the centre of the twofold movement of finite to infinite and infinite to finite, of “man’s ascent within God’s correlative descent”¹⁵⁷ that we described in chapter two. The fulfilment of finite freedom in true participation in infinite freedom through the finite copy’s realisation of the definite model exhibited by the infinite prototype is thus understood christologically. The “place” where we participate in the eternal Sonship (Eph 1:5; Rom 8:17) is the “exemplary prototype (*Urbild*) of finite freedom “in Christ”.¹⁵⁸

So finite freedom’s fulfilment beyond itself is *in Christ*¹⁵⁹ (in whom the infinite freedom truly indwells the finite) and *theosis* is specifically christological, presupposed by the incarnation. Indeed “if we take seriously this mystery of God’s descent into the form of his creature—this was the seminal intuition of the Greek Fathers—the *sarkosis* implies the process of deification *theopoiesis*”,¹⁶⁰ for now the divine prototype [*Urbild*] has indwelt and stamped his divine form upon the copy [*Abbild*]. This understanding of *theosis* as the implication of the incarnation becomes emphatically clear in Balthasar’s thought because he goes further than the Fathers in his understanding of “the divine penetration of the creaturely”, maintaining that “even the sinner’s alienation from God was taken into the Godhead, into the “economic” distance between Father and Son.”¹⁶¹ There is then no distance from God which has not been embraced in the incarnational and redemptive descent of the Son. Thus the understanding that in Christ God’s descent embraces the ascent of man (the image) towards the gracious offer of freedom and divine life¹⁶² is given a new precision and completeness. “In fact” Balthasar says “the creature’s “ascent to God” has already been taken up into the entirely different,

¹⁵⁵ Th IV 383; *Engagement* 21

¹⁵⁶ Th II 202

¹⁵⁷ Th IV 382; cf V 375-6;

¹⁵⁸ Th II 291

¹⁵⁹ Th III 528 “Man both transcends himself and lives in Christ, or allows Christ to live in him” (Gal 2:20)

¹⁶⁰ Th IV 381

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² ET I 162, 177; *Engagement* 37; Th II 202; IV 382-383.

liberating “servitude” of eternal freedom by the grace (*dedit dona*) of the God who first descends to the level of the creature.”¹⁶³

2 The Holy Spirit and the analogia libertatis in the new sphere of love

So we have *theosis* because of the incarnation but we are initiated into it by the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁴ Because of the genuine but unconfused indwelling of infinite freedom in the finite in Christ, the finite pole of the covenant can be realised in the infinite, in the grace of the Spirit who brings into flux the opposition involved in the external confrontation of the old law by being that unique gift of freedom which pours the love of God into our hearts.¹⁶⁵ So because of the christological mediation, in the Spirit, we can enter into the distinct gift of our freedom’s perfection *in* infinite freedom. Thus “man is led into the open realm in which he can love by the love he believes in”,¹⁶⁶ the realm in which personal love acts being the realm of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁷

The Spirit both *enables* the freedom of the finite covenant partners and *initiates* them into the divine life and thus the gracious awakening and sustaining of the finite response, freeing from sin, and initiation into participation are specifically associated with the Holy Spirit:

as the love of God poured into the hearts of believers, [he] brings about two things at the same time: he *liberates* finite freedom so that it may embrace its own, ultimate freedom; and he does so by *initiating* it into a participation in infinite freedom.¹⁶⁸

This is a liberation *from* and a liberation *for*, a liberation from the bondage of sin and a liberation for adoptive participation in the life of God¹⁶⁹ to which the Spirit gives initiation. It is in this relationship with the Spirit that the second pole of finite freedom can be called a *theonomy*, without obscuring or interfering with the first pole. Indeed this divine work of liberation and initiation to which man surrenders is far from some

¹⁶³ Th IV 382

¹⁶⁴ Regarding this inter-working of Christ and Spirit cf Th II 201, 276; III 331; LA 58

¹⁶⁵ We put on Christ’s love “the love of the new and eternal covenant” which is the end of the Old Testament process of education. “Love alone can fulfil the law, being its epitome (Rom 13.10; Gal 5.14) Without love, the law is no more than a negative barrier against sin (I Thess 1. 8f).” LA 104-105

¹⁶⁶ LA 84

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. 59

¹⁶⁸ Th II 230 (my italics)

kind of heteronomous control over man's free self-possession, for it translates man from being a slave to being a child, a friend, an heir of God.

A crucial characteristic of this status is the coincidence of obedient submission on the one hand, and an exalted freedom on the other—'*parrhesia*', free mutual openness, a share in infinite freedom.¹⁷⁰ This union of obedience and freedom (in the Spirit) has as its model and ground the Son's perfect free obedience.¹⁷¹ In Balthasar's distinctive doctrine of the Trinity this is exercised in the Son's filial relationship in the Godhead, but also includes in its economic expression a submission of the incarnate Son to the Spirit, involving a kind of 'reordering' of the traditional understanding of the procession of the divine persons termed a "trinitarian inversion" by Balthasar.¹⁷² The dynamic analogy of being is thus also an analogy of freedom in which "the more completely man participates in God's freedom, the freer he is";¹⁷³ the greater the surrender to the Spirit, the greater the liberation.¹⁷⁴ This "free mutual openness" ("*parrhesia*") graciously bestowed on us by God "here and now" is thus dynamic, finding "its fulfilment in our ultimate state (when God "will be all in all" I Cor 15. 28)."¹⁷⁵ It is the ultimate state that is normative for the reciprocal relationship (and this orientation means *hope* is characteristic of the new life of grace).¹⁷⁶

As with the tradition since Augustine, the final perfection of our freedom lies in a *fixed* choice of the good, although for Balthasar this is not adequately described by Augustine's ideal of 'rest' or the scholastic 'vision'. The final state of the blessed is not restricted to the contemplation of the divinity as of a spectacle, but involves the creative

¹⁶⁹ cf Th IV 367-383 'Freedom Liberated'

¹⁷⁰ Th II 231, 229; cf Augustine's 'mutual sublimation of command and gift' II 233; also V 304 (with citations from Adrienne von Speyr). The coincidence of a total commitment of self and an intensifying liberation can also be found in Staudenmaier cf Th II 306 n 29, 332 n 55; III 208.

¹⁷¹ "Nine propositions on Christian Ethics" in *Principles of Christian Morality* (San Francisco, 1976) 82; Th II 267; III 520ff; IV 330; V 248 (Adrienne von Speyr); cf also Mark A McIntosh: *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1996) 77f. Regarding the Ignatian influence on this understanding of freedom cf Dalzell: *Dramatic* 16, 54, 80, 81, 215.

¹⁷² cf Th III 183-191, 440, 521-2

¹⁷³ *Moment* 82

¹⁷⁴ cf SRC 114

¹⁷⁵ Th II 229

exercise of personal freedom. This is in keeping with Balthasar's understanding that the most precious feature of our earthly experience as free creatures is our *creative activity*, understood as our inter-personal self-surrender (not just the making of forms out of matter). Crucially, the dignity of the person according to which disclosure of self cannot be forced or known in advance is preserved in our ultimate state. There is thus the perpetual joy and surprise of persons mutually disclosing and letting themselves be known, of creative freedom inventing, giving and receiving new and unexpected gifts,¹⁷⁷ and of a dynamic intimacy with and knowledge of God too, such that "existence in God...will be no less full of tension and drama than earthly existence".¹⁷⁸ For, reflecting the relationship between the unity of the one divine freedom and its possession by each of the persons of the Trinity, the participation of creaturely freedom in the divine is an assimilation to the divine will and a complete openness to all other creaturely freedoms but *not* an absorption or loss of each distinct creaturely freedom (an "irrevocable gift"). Each one can undertake creative acts "within the all-encompassing light of the divine will", thus generating the ever new giving and receiving which itself images the aspect of 'surprise' in the Trinity.¹⁷⁹

3 Gift and response in the theonomy of the Spirit

Free love can only be answered with love freely given.¹⁸⁰

So we see that in the theonomy of the Spirit *both* poles of finite freedom are brought to perfection. Our autonomy is not lost, but liberated, and our free response and collaboration have an important part to play—whilst surrender to the divine initiative remains paramount.

¹⁷⁶ cf Th V 146, 428, 469-470

¹⁷⁷ Th V 402ff This perspective is grounded in his rejection of a static divine immutability in favour of movement and a kind of becoming in God (which earthly becoming images). cf Th V 511f and 77f

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 410, 485-487

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 485f, cf also 88

¹⁸⁰ *Engagement* 32, 29

As in Paul, “possession of the Spirit always requires man’s active collaboration”.¹⁸¹ Assimilation to the image of God is through grace *and* human moral effort.¹⁸² So, in keeping with the importance laid on the genuinely two-sided nature of the covenant between God and man and the insistence that the play is not ‘rigged’,¹⁸³ the relationship between divine predestination and human freedom is a dramatic one. Even though Christ’s *sarkosis* is understood to imply our *theopoesis*, and even though

the transition from the Adam-principle to the Christ-principle exhibits a necessity inscribed in the constitution of man’s nature...the ratification of this transition is entrusted to created freedom.¹⁸⁴

Whilst the creature is held in (bestowed) being whether he likes it or not (it is in the nature of creatureliness and at a deeper level part of God’s faithfulness to his intention as Creator), he is not automatically in receipt of the fruit of God’s continuous act of giving which grants participation in God’s own divine life. This he is free to accept or reject.

No one becomes a loving child of the heavenly Father against his own will. Man can freely choose which freedom he prefers. He can choose the freedom of being his own origin, in which case he must pay the price of never being able to find any sufficient reason or satisfying goal for this self-manufactured freedom but must content himself with the exercise of his autonomy; or he can choose the freedom of continually acknowledging his indebtedness, in ever new ways, to absolute freedom—who has always anticipated finite freedom by providing it with scope within which it can fulfil itself, namely, ‘*en christoi*’.¹⁸⁵

Just as God shows himself to be ‘absolute love’ in the self-giving and letting be of his triune constitution, so too he ‘makes room’ for finite freedom in a loving latency that appears like withdrawal, but is a loving, hidden accompanying¹⁸⁶—rather like the way the author of a play allows it to develop freely but under his influence.¹⁸⁷

This unequivocal emphasis on the significance of the finite free response goes hand in hand with emphasis on the perfection of the other pole of man’s freedom, that is, on

¹⁸¹Th V 426

¹⁸²Th II 333; V 380, 387

¹⁸³cf chapter 3 section D1 above

¹⁸⁴Th III 36; V 494

¹⁸⁵Th III 36 On this freedom to say ‘yes and no’ cf III 38; II 228, 314, 316 Such freedom is left intact under the perversion of sin. (IV 330f)

¹⁸⁶Th II 271-284

¹⁸⁷cf Dalzell: *Dramatic* 119

his *total dependence for fulfilment*,¹⁸⁸ on the importance of *complete self-surrender*¹⁸⁹ and openness to *receive* more if our natural orientation towards ‘more’ is ever to be satisfied.¹⁹⁰ (This perfects the indebtedness and receptivity emphasised at the level of the very existence of our nature.)¹⁹¹ To make the appropriate response for the gift of life, and for the gift of participation in the divine life, is to be available and ready, to be receptive, to be *obedient*¹⁹² (just as an actor truly uses his creative freedom in willingly serving as a mediator of the author’s vision¹⁹³). As finite freedom fulfils itself beyond itself in the sphere of infinite freedom, that actual act of entering this realm “will be essentially *codetermined* by the act-quality of infinite freedom.”¹⁹⁴

There is then a genuine but by no means simplistic co-operation between finite and infinite freedom here. It is a very particular interaction and exchange in which “the power of pure grace” always comes first, without making the human response any the less significant.¹⁹⁵ The gift of participation in God’s life in which our fulfilment lies, Balthasar tells us, “can only be grace, freely granted.” He continues: “Grace, however must not only be freely given, it also needs to be freely accepted,” and this is “through a certain influence on the recipient by the same grace.”¹⁹⁶ As Adrienne von Speyr points out, the co-operation is not that of two equal partners. The fact that we can make a genuine contribution does not detract from the fact that every thought and action is dependent on God and that the Christian is called to surrender himself more and more to the influence of grace.¹⁹⁷ The fact that what is received when finite freedom hands itself

¹⁸⁸ eg Th II 178, 250, 272, 284, 292, 303, 313, 397

¹⁸⁹ This self-surrender is made “to God’s eternal, loving will, which chooses us in Christ.” Th II 308

¹⁹⁰ Th II 398; IV 142

¹⁹¹ cf chapter 4 section B1 above

¹⁹² Th II 267

¹⁹³ cf Dalzell: *Dramatic* 121, 126

¹⁹⁴ Th II 314 (my italics)

¹⁹⁵ Th III 53 We have already mentioned this “final *prius* of grace” in our discussion of the nature-grace relationship as *imago Trinitatis*. For an expression of this understanding of the relationship between nature and grace as it exists in prayer cf Adrienne von Speyr: *The World of Prayer* (Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1985) 273-298.

¹⁹⁶ Th III 35; I 363

¹⁹⁷ cf *World of Prayer* 274-298 It is not that God ‘takes us over’, or ‘hypnotises’ us. Rather “the fact that God is near to us makes us freer, and what we do together with God is done better and more productively. There is a kind of communion and collaboration that expands man’s horizon and

over to find its fulfilment in God is so uniquely enabling (rather than deterministically binding) and is thus appreciated as a wonderful *gift* (rather than a confining burden) means “when man acknowledges his indebtedness, no alienating compulsion is involved: there wells up within him spontaneously, a sense of privilege in handing himself over to his origin.”¹⁹⁸ Freedom is a gift called to be genuinely and increasingly active and alive in itself; but this vitality truly possessed within owes everything to a Giver upon whose free, loving decision to give ‘life in abundance’ everything depends. He “has been ‘*granted* to have life in himself’”¹⁹⁹—and hence the fact that *thanksgiving* is central to the act of response.

The grace-freedom relationship is thus a dynamic, thriving, changing one, engaging us in the life-long task of expressing gratitude for the gift of self by making our whole existence into a response of thanksgiving.²⁰⁰ We give ourselves in response to God’s offering of himself to us.²⁰¹ This authentic receptivity to the gift of freedom and its perfection in our receipt of the life of God himself means a rich co-productivity in the free creature. For God’s revelation not only *exhibits* his love, but makes it understood, and invites and empowers its imitation and reproduction within the human heart.²⁰² The gift of grace implies a *task*.²⁰³

In its higher potency, grace endows the one who receives it with a special receptivity: he is enabled to conceive, to be a womb; he is enabled to bring to maturity the fruit he has been given....²⁰⁴

Such conception and birth fulfils our fundamental creaturely receptivity. And so the ‘task’ (*Aufgabe*) inherent in the initial gift (*Gabe*) of freedom can become the responsive

freedom...God does not overpower man; he does not oppress man in his role as the “Absolute”. He helps man toward his freedom. Man can invite him and ask him to fashion the good in him.” (274) In so doing man must recognise the ongoing need to surrender himself and everything he thinks of as his own and let God thus mould him by his grace. (It is evident throughout this section in the *World of Prayer* that von Speyr’s understanding of this surrender in prayer can be quite radical (involving for example being led “willy-nilly by God” 284)) This relationship between human and divine action is central to theo-drama: “It is God who acts, on man, for man and then together with man; the involvement of man in the divine action is part of God’s *action*”. Th I 18

¹⁹⁸ Th III 36

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Th II 290

²⁰¹ Th V 383

²⁰² Th III 518

²⁰³ Th II 314

thanksgiving of a mission (discussed in detail in chapter seven), a free obedience which makes a unique contribution to the theo-drama, a co-operation with the saving will of God that Balthasar calls “the grace of co-atonement”.²⁰⁵ It can include suffering, transformed by the crucified Christ into something fruitful, “co-redemptive”.²⁰⁶ This *total* giving of our lives may then entail personal tragedy, but a ‘tragedy under grace’.²⁰⁷

Two further points need to be made here. Firstly there is the fact that *Mary* is the unique model of this fruitfulness of the relationship of grace and freedom,²⁰⁸ and in this marian model we see the formal description of the relationship of finite and infinite freedom ‘in action’ in the scenes of the theo-drama. In *Mary* we see perfect reciprocity between heaven and earth, God and man, nature and grace, in an intensifying mutual receptivity. This runs from earth to heaven (that is, from her reception (conception) of the Son which expands to fulfilment in her assumption into heaven), and from heaven to earth (that is, from the Son’s reception of her into heaven, which has as its high point the Son’s conception by her).²⁰⁹ Thus there is “an eternal circuit between God and man, heaven and earth, spiritual world and material world”,²¹⁰ in which, nevertheless, “grace has the primacy, the grace of the immaculate conception, giving nature—albeit a nature created from the outset with a view to receiving this gift—the grace to receive grace in its fullness.”²¹¹ As we have seen, Balthasar understands this exemplary instance of the relationship between nature and grace as an image of the relations of the persons of the Trinity one to one another.²¹² In particular it images the Son in his relation to the Father,

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 184; “fruitfulness” Ibid. 315

²⁰⁵ Th III 535

²⁰⁶ Th V 501, cf also 479-481; I 647

²⁰⁷ “Tragedy under grace is what is experienced by the man who wants to do the truth and is brought down because truth cannot be done in this world; graceless tragedy is the lot of the man who does not want the truth.” R Schneider cited Th I 120

²⁰⁸ Th V 466 (with reference to Ambrose). We have already mentioned the marian dimension to our natural creaturely receptivity (chapter 4 section B1) and alluded to her as the perfect model of receptivity to grace (note 48 above). Regarding the necessity of the feminine mediatorial profile cf section F below.

²⁰⁹ Th V 104 (Adrienne von Speyr)

²¹⁰ Ibid.; cf Gardner, Moss: “Something like Time; something like the Sexes” in Gardner, Moss, Quash, Ward: *Balthasar at the End of Modernity* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1999) 133

²¹¹ Th V 105

²¹² chapter 4 section E above

who is not only the archetype of receptivity,²¹³ but also of response, carrying out his mission in perfect and generous obedience to the Father,²¹⁴ accepting and returning the world to the Father as a means of thanksgiving,²¹⁵

making a fitting response to the Father's total gift of himself by freely and thankfully allowing himself to be poured forth by the Father.²¹⁶

As we will see later²¹⁷ Balthasar develops the idea that Mary's exceptional receptivity not only gives a supreme illustration of how the nature-grace relationship can be, but is also a receptivity exercised by her, "the highest product of nature",²¹⁸ for all of us. In this context we look not just at the annunciation and assumption but at another 'scene' of the play: the passion and cross, where Mary utters a representative yes to God on behalf of those who refuse to respond. Mary's role as model of receptivity and response, of the authentic interrelationship of freedom with grace, is also very important to Balthasar's theology of gender, his understanding of woman as response/answer, the spousal/nuptial dimension of *communio* and the Church's relationship to Christ as bride,²¹⁹ as well as the understanding of the relationship between the Marian profile of the Church and the Petrine institutional profile—topics which go well beyond the scope of this present work.

The second point to be made is that the relationship between gift and response, grace and freedom, outlined here is central to—indeed Balthasar claims actually *constitutes*—the action of the *Theo-drama*. In the transition from the understanding of grace belonging to the aesthetics to that of the theodramatics he points to the intimate relationship between *grace* and *gratitude*.²²⁰ The delight in the objective gracefulness of a form becomes with the Greeks the self-attesting favour of the gods, so powerfully

²¹³cf chapter 4 section B1 above

²¹⁴cf Th II 267 and notes 171, 172 above

²¹⁵Ibid. 262

²¹⁶Th IV 329-330, 324

²¹⁷chapter 6 section E4 below

²¹⁸Th V 104

²¹⁹cf Th III Part III B especially 283-292 ("Woman's Answer") and 339-360 ("The Answer of the Church"); on the spousal dimension cf end section B3 above; cf also discussion of the man-woman and Christ-Church relationship in chapter 6 section B2 and E2 below (especially Th II 413-414 but also 365-382).

attested that the receiver is compelled to respond, to meet it, to give thanks. For Balthasar the full significance of *charis* lies in the interplay of both meanings, and in the *Theo-drama* the enrapturing experience of the revelation of God of the aesthetics demands a life-changing response that opens up the action of theo-drama, carrying through the ethical implications contained within the aesthetics.²²¹ This response, this *decision* for or against the revelation of the Word made flesh is “*the drama*”,²²² and the tension immanent in human nature between the necessary character of the transition from Adam to Christ principle, and the fact that it can only be ratified freely, is a tension constituting “the entire action of the theo-drama”.²²³ “If ultimately everything comes from God, if only heaven is active and earth is merely passive, there can never be a drama. Without this presupposition all Christology would dissolve in Monophysitism, and the doctrine of grace would dissolve in extreme Predestinationism.”²²⁴ The free acceptance or refusal to co-operate with grace has a dynamic effect on the drama. We need to join in *performing* the *good* that God has done for us so as to embody it in the world.²²⁵ Man shapes the stage through the measure of his receptivity “which enables him in an earthly way to receive heavenly things and give birth to them, and through the measure of his freedom to keep the kingdom of heaven away from the earth or, conversely, to cause it to come nearer”,²²⁶ an alternative whose confrontation becomes more and not less intense as the play goes on.²²⁷ As we have just seen, our individual freedom is even to contribute to the eternal drama of heaven itself where we will exercise genuine creativity within the divine will,²²⁸ and, notwithstanding the asymmetrical nature of the grace-freedom relationship, Balthasar suggests that our

²²⁰Th II 23-24

²²¹Ibid. 30-31

²²²Ibid. 26, 260

²²³Th III 36; Whilst Christ died for all, the justification of each sinner requires the individual's conversion and consent: “Who could possibly penetrate to this hidden, dramatic wrestling of God and the sinner?” (V 494)

²²⁴Th II 184

²²⁵Th I 20, 645 (co-actors with God)

²²⁶Th II 188; III 37-38

²²⁷Th III 37-38

²²⁸Th V 486; cf section D2 above

response may actually affect God.²²⁹ Nevertheless we will have to weigh this emphasis on the drama between God and man against the emphasis on the drama of the inner life of the Trinity in which it is contained.

E Participation in the Trinity

1 The indwelling of the Trinity - participation in the divine processions

We have seen that Balthasar adopts and modifies the patristic use of transition from image to likeness for understanding the fulfilment of the human vocation, focusing on *freedom* as a defining characteristic of the image and understanding its fulfilment as *similitudo* in a participation in “the absolute character of infinite freedom” which is clearly supernatural but non-heteronomous.

In the first place this fulfilment is through participation in Jesus’ existence, living in him or allowing him to live in us, but this is an indwelling “which entails the indwelling of the “We” of the Trinity also.”²³⁰ Balthasar maintains that trying to make further distinctions about the particular divine Person involved in indwelling betrays a blindness to the mutual indwelling *circumincessio* of the divine Persons within the Trinity itself.²³¹ Our participation is a “trans-psychological reciprocal indwelling” which is different from but based on the reciprocal indwelling of the persons of the Trinity.²³² (Indeed the fact that we have participation in the divinity without confusion is grounded in the fact that the triune persons enjoy the highest of unions without confusion.²³³) Moreover our participation is actually located within the internal life of the Trinity as a gift that the

²²⁹On this question of God’s immutability cf Dalzell: *Dramatic* 204-211; “The Enrichment of God in Balthasar’s Trinitarian Eschatology” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 66 2001 3-18; Gerard O’Hanlon: “Theological Dramatics” in Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris, eds.: *The Beauty of Christ* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1994) 99; *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990).

²³⁰ Th III 528

²³¹ Ibid.; V 148, 336, 384, 426f, 431 (John of the Cross), 518 In fact we have found little evidence of Trinitarian circumincessio in the *Theo-drama*, finding the term used rather with reference to the relationship between the first and second Adam.

²³² Th V 493

²³³ ET I 177

divine persons make to each other²³⁴ and, crucially, is specifically a *participation in the inner relationships of the Trinity*, that is *in the divine processions*.²³⁵ This gives a distinct vibrancy to the concept of reciprocal indwelling, defining it more in terms of a creative relationship than simple abiding presence. Indeed Balthasar considers it insufficient

to portray the life of grace in terms of a special ‘presence’ and ‘indwelling’ of the Person of the Son and the Spirit (sent by the Father) in the souls of the recipients of grace; the *purpose* of this indwelling is to enable men to participate in the relations between the Divine Persons

and, in Balthasar’s doctrine of the Trinity “*relations* are precisely what these Persons are, wholly and entirely.”²³⁶ This emphatically intra-trinitarian perspective on the reciprocal indwelling is developed in Balthasar’s taking up of the theme of ‘being born of God’.

F Living in the Trinity: being ‘born of God’ and the eternal begetting of the Son

To be endowed with grace essentially means being accepted as sons in the eternal Son (Rom 8: 15-17).²³⁷

The receipt of sanctifying grace and the co-operative action between God and man which puts man in living possession of his ‘idea’, the immanence of infinite freedom (that is, the Spirit as Giver) in finite freedom (the gift), and participation in the triune life of God are described by Balthasar in terms of the grace of being begotten or born of God.²³⁸

As our “idea” is just one aspect of the total Idea which in the Son (destined to be incarnate) is infinite, Balthasar maintains that it must come into being at the point of the Father’s self-declaration in generating the Son²³⁹—a description that recalls and develops the identification of the God-creature and the Father-Son relationship discussed in

²³⁴ Th V 507; 521

²³⁵ Ibid. 425, 428, 463, 466, 467

²³⁶ Ibid. 428

²³⁷ Ibid. 433 (Here Balthasar is speaking specifically of the scriptural basis for the Medieval Rhenish-Flemish teaching on ‘being born of God’.)

²³⁸ Th II 302-311 especially 308ff; V 425-470

²³⁹ Th II 308; V 390

chapter two. From the perspective of finite freedom this ‘birth’ is the complete self-surrender to the eternal, loving will of God to choose us in Christ that we have been describing in this chapter. From God’s vantage point it is the mystery of “being born of God” *understood as the adoption of the creature into the process whereby the Son comes forth from the Father*, a begetting in grace with the eternal Son²⁴⁰ through which, in the Spirit, the creature becomes a son and heir with Christ,²⁴¹ sharing in his sonship.²⁴² Balthasar again gives this the form of an *imago trinitatis*: the child adopted in Christ now shares with him the gift of the Spirit and sends the Spirit back to the Father in the form of a Yes in Christ, such that the Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the child, can be said to be “their mutuality, their ‘we’”.²⁴³ Just as we saw earlier it is only on the basis of the Father’s generation of the Son and their united procession of the Spirit that finite freedom can know itself to be addressed as a ‘thou’, so too it is only from the Father surrendering the Son that the creature can be addressed as adoptive son.²⁴⁴

This birth within/into the eternal relations of the persons of the Trinity becomes *operative* for the individual believer in the incarnation, the begetting of the Son in man, in the womb of Mary and then in the Church. It acquires *concrete form* in baptism-confirmation when “Christ (the Church) draws believers into the mystery of being born of God”.²⁴⁵ This represents the first utterance of the Word and breathing of the Spirit ‘before the foundation of the world’, in which the world order is prefigured in the infinite Idea and a particular place reserved for believers in Christ. In his faithful discipleship the believer then ‘gives birth’ to Christ in the world. Balthasar’s understanding of ‘participation in the divine processions’ is thus a “participation of the creature, through grace, in the Father’s trinitarian generative power”, through the mediation of Son and Spirit (to whom the Father communicates all that is his), and

²⁴⁰Th II 308; III 35, 258, 527; V 433

²⁴¹Th II 308

²⁴²Th IV 242-243

²⁴³Th III 36 note 1, cf 527; V 432 (According to John of the Cross the breathing of the Holy Spirit by Father and Son becomes a breathing on the part of the soul.)

²⁴⁴Th III 254

²⁴⁵Th II 308

through the mediation of the feminine principle of the Church/Mary/the Soul given creaturely, receptive participation in the Father's primal fruitfulness.²⁴⁶

This understanding is derived from Scripture, particularly the Johannine writings,²⁴⁷ and from Patristic reflection on it,²⁴⁸ where 'being born of God' is the birth of the Word by the eternal Father's heart and the implanting of this same Word in the hearts of believers (through the mediation of the church). Mary's reception of the Word is the model of this. Throughout, this mediation of the feminine principle of Mary/Church conceiving and giving birth is evident, such that the union of the individual soul with God and his/her giving birth to God and Christ is always in the ecclesiological context. Balthasar considers this feminine principle to be essential. The process of the divine birth moves in the direction of both the Church as "the totality of the Logos coming-to-be in the world",²⁴⁹ and the individual in baptism and his or her 'baptism-life', that is, a life bearing witness to this baptism lived according to the pattern of Christ.

While Mary gives birth to the Church's Head, the Church (in the font) gives birth to the Head's members who, incorporated in him, are "mystically" the Logos himself. These members however, together form the Church—and the more perfect the individual members are, the more perfectly they realise the Church's nature—and they themselves, for their part, give birth to Christ.²⁵⁰

Looked at from below man appears to allow himself "to be refashioned and assimilated to Christ (Rom 8:29; Phil 3.21)", and from above the Word allows himself to "take shape in the totality of his Body (the Church) and in her individual member (the believer)."²⁵¹ It is Cyril of Alexandria's understanding of this mystical ecclesiological copying of Christ's birth from Mary that includes the full trinitarian content thus making it "centre stage"²⁵² for Balthasar. Cyril draws attention to the perfecting work of

²⁴⁶ Th V 468-9

²⁴⁷ eg Jn 1:13; 3: 3, 5-8 Although the basic principle is also Pauline: that "to be endowed with grace essentially means being accepted as Sons in the eternal Son (Rom 8: 15-17)." (Th V 433) cf V 426ff; III 229 note 68, 258.

²⁴⁸ Th II 308-9; V 462-469 making close use of H Rahner's "Die Gottgeburt. die Lehre der Kirchenvater von der Geburt Christi in den Herzen der Glaubigen" in *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 59 (1935). 333-418, reprinted with slight changes in *Symbole der Kirche, die Ekklesiologie der Vater* (Salzburg: Otto Muller, 1964), 11-87.

²⁴⁹ Th II 309

²⁵⁰ Th V 464

²⁵¹ Th II 309; V 464-466 Here Balthasar refers to Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Origen and Methodius.

²⁵² Th V 467

the Spirit in us (corresponding to his overshadowing of the Virgin in the incarnation) such that

Christ is formed in us, because *the Holy Spirit causes us to share in the divine process of formation...*the stamp (*charakter*) of God the Father's nature [Heb 1:3 that is, the Son] is impressed in our souls, the Holy Spirit sanctifying and conforming us to Christ.²⁵³

We can see how this would strike a chord with Balthasar's understanding of the life of grace as a participation in the divine processions.

Balthasar thinks the theological wealth in this patristic reflection is lacking in later development.²⁵⁴ However the explicit association of the Son's begetting and our 'birth from God' owes much to this development as the theme passes from Origen to Maximus and from there to Scotus Erigena and then on to Meister Eckhart and the Rhenish-Flemish mystics. Balthasar acknowledges that it is from Eckhart in particular that being 'born of God' means being "drawn into the Son's 'coming forth' from the Father",²⁵⁵ whereas in John the relationship is between our birth from God and the Son's birth "of God" *in the incarnation* (Jn I: 13), which is thus established as the archetype of all divine birth²⁵⁶. Alongside this undoubted influence and the substantial attention Balthasar gives Eckhart in his treatment of the topic in the last volume of the *Theodrama*,²⁵⁷ Balthasar is critical of Eckhart's failure to re-evaluate neoplatonic influences in the light of his Christianity, such as his "trend toward absolute unicity" which sees all multiplicity in a negative light looking 'above' the Trinity for the transcendent Ground of all things.²⁵⁸ He draws attention in particular to his overlooking of the Marian principle (an omission not untypical of the medieval period) characterised in Eckhart by the understanding of creatures themselves as nothing²⁵⁹ (in contrast to the real (Marian)

²⁵³ *Commentary on Isaiah IV*, or.2 *Patrologia Graeca* 70 936BC

²⁵⁴ Th V 428

²⁵⁵ Th III 229 note 68 The influence of Eckhart on Balthasar's connection of the begetting of the Son and our creation (described in chapter 2 section C above) is also to be noted. For an interesting discussion of the ambivalent relationship with the medieval mystic cf Cyril O'Regan: "Balthasar and Eckhart: Theological Principles and Catholicity" *The Thomist* April 1996 vol. 60 2 203-239.

²⁵⁶ Th V 426-7

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 434-444 Of the various approaches described the treatment of Eckhart is the lengthiest.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 437, 443; I 551-558

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 436f

receptivity of creaturely being described above²⁶⁰). Consequently, the individual person is relativised and a genuine analogy of being collapses, leading to a confusion between creature and God.²⁶¹ Balthasar favours the modifications of Eckhart's followers with their more concrete christological approach, especially that of Ruysbroeck.²⁶²

Balthasar is concerned to keep the idea biblical and save it from "a Neoplatonic undertow".²⁶³ He rules out any understanding in which the Logos's birth in the Church meant some kind of growth or becoming in the world,²⁶⁴ and he rejects seeing the Son as God's single, primal Idea with creaturely being as just a variety of participations in it. Thus also, crucially for us, he disallows the idea that the "*In-sich-Sein* (natural self-being) of beings at the natural level merges with participation in Christ through grace".²⁶⁵ This rejection is obviously very important for finalising his position on the relation between nature and grace, on the 'duality' of grace we have described in this chapter. Here he is clearly saying we cannot merge our natural self-being and our adoptive participation, and he explicitly denies that being created and being born of God are one single process.²⁶⁶

However this distinction is not always so clear in his intra-trinitarian description. No doubt one of the most striking things about encountering this association of our *rebirth by grace* with an adoption into the eternal generation of the Son is the fact that we have already discussed a similar association of our *creation* with the generation of the Son in chapter two.²⁶⁷ There we found that the grounding of the fact that there is a world at all in the fact that there is a Son as well as the Father focuses on the eternal generative love of the Father bringing forth the Son as the origin of the world and in such a way that undoubtedly draws an analogy between creation and begetting. So it seems

²⁶⁰ cf chapter 4 section B1 above

²⁶¹ cf esp Th V 441; 463; II 306-7

²⁶² Th V 457-458

²⁶³ Th II 311

²⁶⁴ Rather, the realm of becoming is thus made to correspond more and more to God's Being, to be drawn into the first and all-embracing Idea and become the expression of it. Th II 311

²⁶⁵ Th II 311 Whilst there is inclination in this direction in Scotus Erigena and Eckhart, Balthasar maintains they did distinguish between nature and grace in this respect. cf Th II 311 note 41 and V 439

²⁶⁶ Th II 311;

then that *both* our creation and our adoption ‘happen with’²⁶⁸ the eternal generation of the Son. Both gifts are united in having as their condition of possibility the *primal* divine self-bestowal of the eternal generation of the Son (which ‘spills over’ into the kenosis of incarnation and redemption²⁶⁹) and, as it were, ‘contains’ both the divine self-giving of creation and of ‘re-creation’ in grace, such that both can be associated with the eternal begetting of the Son as we have described. Balthasar can talk about both analogies together²⁷⁰ and can even see the whole sweep of the Father’s kenotic self-giving in the Son as so closely tied with our creation and adoption that he can actually say that our adoption as sons is something “the Father gives (automatically (*selbstverständlich*), as it were) when surrendering his only Son for our sake”.²⁷¹ However he never fully clarifies the relationship between all these associated events (the Father’s begetting and surrendering of the Son and our creation and participation). We are therefore left with the fact that both creation and adoption are clearly identified with the eternal begetting (a powerful expression of continuity/simultaneity between creation and participation) but in their unfolding in the worldly sphere they are denied the continuity of one process (thus clearly separating the two ‘events’). Indeed here Balthasar seems to want to draw a sharp distinction between the basic ‘created’ relation to Christ as the “first born of all creation” in, through and for whom all things are created according to their natures, and the kind of participatory relationship that exists under his headship in the Church, as his body.²⁷² He goes so far as to say of the latter that the “church does not belong on the side of created beings”, belonging “in a different way to the ‘First-born’, the ‘Image of the invisible God’”, as “the organism in whom he imprints himself upon

²⁶⁷chapter 2 section C above

²⁶⁸eg “*Mit-Zeugung*” TD II, 2 32 (Th III 35)

²⁶⁹cf chapter 6 section D2 below

²⁷⁰TD II, 2 32 (Th III 35): “Ein Moment der Warumlosigkeit besteht sowohl in der Erschaffung wie in der Mit-Zeugung mit dem ewigen Sohn...” (the English translation “...man is created and begotten together with the eternal Son” could be understood to imply a stronger association). In Th III 229 note 68 the analogy between begetting and creation is presented as a *bridge* to our rebirth (and indeed to the kenosis of the Son becoming a creature).

²⁷¹Th III 254 (TD II, 2 233) This is an example of the possible intra-trinitarian christological constriction we mentioned in chapter two and will raise again in our conclusions.

²⁷²Th II 311 Balthasar bases his description here on Col 1: 15-18.

the universe, fashioning it after his own pattern, as ‘the fullness’ of him who, as Ephesians 1.23 says, fills all in all.” There is a relationship of *potentiality* between the plurality of created beings and the pluriform unity of Christ, but he states that the Church (“the fullness filled by the fullness of Christ”) “stands in clear contrast to the created universe”,²⁷³ a contrast which is not easy to reconcile with the implications of his christocentric perspective on creation.²⁷⁴

The difficulty here is no doubt partly because of the uniqueness of the perspective adopted where we have the mysterious combination of everything seeming to be contained in the Father’s generation of the Son *but also* ‘becoming operative’ and ‘made concrete’ in separate events in time (incarnation in Mary/Church; Baptism/Confirmation). In other words we have the difficulty of a description that ‘cross-sections’ both time and eternity, giving us the view of things as they are (‘laid up’) in the Being of God and as they come to be in the becoming of time and are thus brought into correspondence more and more with the Being of God.²⁷⁵ Nevertheless there is still an issue for a theology trying to describe these ‘events’ as to whether a highly synthetic approach is taken or whether weight is given to the fact that these things happen at different points in time. Balthasar is clearly aware of these possibilities but does not seem to attribute much significance to the question of which approach is taken. In a footnote he acknowledges that “the individual aspects can be considered in relative isolation from one another” and cites Maximus’ twofold birth from God in which initially we are *potentially* (*dynamei*) given the entire grace of being children of God and then given the grace *actually* (*Kat’energeian*) such that our entire will is refashioned by the Spirit and directed towards God. However in the main body of the text he refers us to the synthetic patristic view, and indeed seems particularly struck by the comprehensive nature of the patristic notion embracing in one view the

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ If creation is for Christ and this orientation culminates in our union with him as members of his body, the Church, how can creation and Church be placed in this kind of opposition? On Balthasar’s christocentric doctrine of creation cf chapter two section A; chapter three section C and p 124 above.

²⁷⁵ cf Th II 311

doctrines of the Trinity, christology, ecclesiology, grace, the sacraments and Christian life, both baptism and the *electio* of Ignatius Loyola.²⁷⁶

The problem of systematically depicting worldly events as imaging vividly portrayed eternal ‘events’ in the being of God is one that we have already come up against and it will crop up again. And it is not only clarity about continuity and distinction in the nature-grace relationship which is affected. The association of adoption and eternal begetting discussed here only adds to the accumulating concerns about how Balthasar’s very specific association of creaturely processes with the Son-Father relationship in the Spirit affects his doctrine of God.²⁷⁷ Whilst in itself this is not our topic it is a very important implication (perhaps the most important implication) of Balthasar’s treatment of it and so we shall return to this question in the concluding chapters.

²⁷⁶Ibid. 309

²⁷⁷eg chapter 2 section C; chapter 4 section E above

PART III

**FROM ‘MAN IN GOD’ TO
‘PERSONS IN CHRIST’**

Chapter 6

Nature-grace and anthropology

A Introduction

1 *Meta-anthropology*

Balthasar's understanding of the history of thought delineates a move away from a cosmological perspective in favour of an anthropological one. For Balthasar this gives anthropology a fresh significance for the theology of his day, even though he is highly critical of the anthropocentrism which he believes much theology has fallen into in its concern to engage with the situation of modern man.¹ He is clear nevertheless that we do have to engage with contemporary, not ancient or medieval understanding of the world, (although this may include the retrieval of past insights lost in the contemporary outlook). *Love Alone* (and before that *Science Religion and Christianity*) is exemplary of the basic direction. It plots a progress from a cosmological perspective on the nature-supernature relationship to an anthropological one, finally settling upon love as the way into the question, with intersubjectivity as an initial pointer (as we mentioned at the beginning of chapter four). The approach is what he called a 'meta-anthropology'. For Balthasar, in today's situation, the relation with the rest of the universe is now *contained* in anthropology (as philosophy). Meta-*physics* has been replaced by meta-*anthropology*:

¹He is keenly aware of the dangers in the waning of cosmological significance in favour of anthropocentrism (cf *Science, Religion and Christianity* (Burns and Oates, London 1958) and his rejection of anthropological reduction in the theology of revelation in *Love Alone the Way of Revelation* (Burns and Oates 1968)). His criticism is particularly clear in *The Moment of Christian Witness* in his delineation of "the theses of the philosophical system" and the ensuing anthropocentrism which culminates in the anthropologising of christology (61-113).

Let us say above all that the traditional term ‘metaphysics’ signified the act of transcending physics, which for the Greeks signified the totality of the cosmos, of which man was a part. For us, physics is something else: the science of the material world. For us, the cosmos perfects itself in man, who at the same time sums up the world and surpasses it. Thus our philosophy will be essentially a meta-anthropology, presupposing not only the cosmological sciences but also the anthropological sciences, and surpassing them toward the question of the being and essence of man.²

This approach, described here in 1988 a few weeks before his death, thus embraces and transcends *both* the cosmological as well as the anthropological sciences. The starting point and ‘spring board’ for our investigations is man. Indeed here in this short summary of the essence of his work we begin with a “reflection on the situation of man”. But as a *meta*-anthropology, this anthropic starting point leads directly to the question of *being*. Reflection on man as limited being, open to the unlimited leads immediately to the reassertion of the ‘real distinction’. The question of essence and *esse*, of the division of finite and infinite at the heart of classical metaphysical enquiry, is presented precisely as a question of the human situation. And so Balthasar’s central project of the one, beautiful, good and true, the transcendental attributes of being discussed most comprehensively in his Trilogy, is thus a *meta-anthropological* one. It starts with man’s essential intersubjectivity (as we have seen in the previous two chapters). The primal inter-personal encounter of mother and child reveals that being is one, good, true and beautiful and, under the analogy of being, that it is in an analogical relationship with the divine transcendentals. Balthasar’s meta-anthropological approach is therefore an attempt “to construct a philosophy and a theology starting from an analogy not of an abstract Being, but of Being as it is encountered concretely in its attributes (not categorical, but transcendental).”³ So, the question of being, of essence and existence which Balthasar considers to be lost in the ‘system’ of much contemporary thought,⁴ does remain central. However it is presented concretely, not abstractly, from the specifically anthropocentric perspective of modern thought,

² *My Work In Retrospect* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1993) 114

³ *Ibid.* 114-115

⁴ cf eg *Moment* 61-76 esp 68

including much of its preoccupations (eg dialogue), although these are reassessed by Balthasar.

2 *Theo-dramatic meta-anthropology*

Balthasar's dramatic resources place man first and foremost as the content of the play.⁵ Whilst there can have been little doubt that the finite freedom under consideration in part II of this thesis was that belonging to human nature, the discussion of freedom in chapter four at least was basically ideal and abstract in form, securing the finite-infinite freedom relationship as the formal datum of theo-drama.⁶ Balthasar sees this discussion (in which, as we mentioned before, the possessor of finite freedom could in the main just as well have been an angel⁷) as a prologue to a concrete consideration of the specific creature endowed with this freedom, that is, man. A whole section in *Theo-drama* II is dedicated to this.⁸ In this chapter then we will consider this treatment of man, moving from there to the question of personhood, which we focus on in the next chapter and conclude our analysis of Balthasar's treatment of our topic with a consideration of whether we can 'hope that all men will be saved'.

Once we ask 'what is man', once he appears in all his concreteness, our range extends beyond that of dramatic presupposition: the drama "becomes suddenly and abruptly real."⁹ Thus in addressing the concrete question of the specific creature endowed with the freedom we have been considering, in asking what is the nature of the human creature, our consideration, Balthasar contends, is to be dramatic not essentialist. We can only ask about man's essence, about what kind of being he is, about what is "essential and (relatively) unchanging in all man's acts and states" from within his dramatic performance of existence. "There is no other anthropology but the dramatic."¹⁰

⁵ Th I 256

⁶ Th II 335

⁷ cf chapter 4 section A2 above

⁸ Th II II C 335-429

⁹ Th II 335

¹⁰ Ibid.

One of the first questions raised by this approach is *how one goes about* considering man from the dramatic performance of his existence. We can be clear that for Balthasar this means considering man from within the ongoing action—but *at what point* from within the ongoing action? It would appear that Balthasar proceeds from the action *currently* being played out by man, his realistic existence as we know it. From the theological perspective this means focusing on the third ‘state’ of human nature, the *natura reparata*, and therefore investigating all the acts or states of mankind (the *status naturae integrae*, *naturae lapsae* and last *status naturae glorificatae*) on the basis of the third, the *natura reparata*, which is currently being played by mankind. This is obviously a crucial decision of determining significance for his anthropology. It is in keeping with his christological focus on understanding the nature of man, that it is from Christ we understand what man is. Nevertheless it is a decision which could open him to attack on two sides: from those concerned that his christocentric approach overlooks the significance of the *natura integra*, of man as created by God, for our understanding of human nature, and from those concerned that he (and indeed Catholic theology in general) does not take seriously enough the effect of the *status naturae lapsae*. However Balthasar does not want simply to think of these states of nature (which he has renamed ‘acts’ in accordance with the dramatic turn in terminology) “as a purely temporal succession of different, mutually exclusive states, for the *natura reparata* that roughly designates our place in the theo-drama coincides to a large extent with the *natura lapsa* yet is able to participate proleptically (*spe, non re*) in the ultimate state.”¹¹ So in focusing on our current act, Balthasar by no means excludes the relevance of the others for how we understand what man is. On the contrary by focusing on the *natura reparata* Balthasar is also *de facto* drawing upon the *lapsa* and *glorificata* for his understanding of man, because *reparata* is a transitional or rather ‘transfigurational’ state in which *fallen* man is ‘repaired’ and *transformed* into the *glorified* image of the Son.

¹¹ Th II 335-336; cf III 298

Strangely though, in this ‘collection’ of states within the one current state the *natura integra* is not mentioned. Does the condition in which God created us in the beginning not after all have some implication for our understanding of who man is? Does it have no bearing on our current state? What has happened to the relative significance of the first Adam? Is there no significant continuity between the first and the second creation after all? The omission of this state from those that have some bearing on our current act may be accidental, after all an understanding of the *status reparata* and *glorificata* would normally involve a recognition that the reparation involves restoration to the original state as well as giving an even greater gift of participation which comes to fruition in the final state. Perhaps therefore the significance of the *integra* is implicit. But it is not made explicit, which is at the least disappointing, particularly with a view to concerns about the significance of nature raised by his perspective from early in his career (in his alignment with de Lubac’s position) and by the influence of Barthian christocentrism (which has little interest in the significance of the first Adam). We have seen that he can in principle offer a potentially great corrective to this ‘constriction’,¹² but the omission here of the state in which we were created cannot help but make us feel that the insight of this corrective, that is the necessary and abiding significance of nature precisely in an authentic christocentric perspective, has somehow been undermined. The possible inconsistency in the significance given to the Adam principle, raised in the conclusion to chapter three, would seem to support this.

Balthasar continues to pursue the kind of method outlined in previous chapters, exploring from below the anthropological state of affairs without specific reference in the first instance to the Christian solution which he proposes as the sole ‘answer’. The main difference though between the methodology in the previous chapter and in this is that now we do not prescind from the drama: we are in the middle of it. Nevertheless a clear theological delineation of the scene we find ourselves in is postponed, as initially we consider the state of affairs without the light shed on it by Christian revelation.

¹² chapter 3 section C and D above

3 Paradox and riddle

Proceeding on the basis of man's realistic existence as we know it, it is evident that he is in a condition of alienation and of peculiar contradiction. There is an awareness of having 'fallen away' from his origin. As regards our personal freedom, now that we consider it under the condition of our concrete experience, we note that it only operates within the rules of a universal spiritual nature, that it is bound to a subtle organic and mechanical system dependent on a given external world, and that it is bound by the overwhelming power of its own instincts.¹³ This too suggests that this condition is only one 'scene', pointing back to an origin and forward to a destination—even if it cannot be (re)constructed.

The aspect of contradiction is evident from man's very situation in the cosmos, simultaneously rooted in it (physical and sensory nature) and reaching above it (intellectual and spiritual)—not simply as the heightening of the sensory and instinctual level but also contrary to it, even to the point of mutual destruction (eg the strong versus the good).¹⁴ Man is a paradox, unlike anything else in nature. He cannot be defined by anything outside of himself: "the material aspect of the world does not even hint at the direction man ought to take if he is to realise himself".¹⁵ Because of his relation (as finite freedom) to infinite freedom, he is superior to all the finitude of the world, yet he cannot grasp "infinite freedom as a means of self-perfection within the terms of the world; for this would conflict with the concept of freedom".¹⁶ So man must define himself. But as he is not in a position to step outside the dramatic action to consider the part he is playing, and as it is impossible to piece together from the contradictory state of our current brokenness the original totality that we were or the

¹³(Romans 7) Th II 336-7

¹⁴ Ibid. 337-338

¹⁵ Ibid. 341

¹⁶ Ibid. 341

ultimate one that we are meant to be,¹⁷ we find that (without his essential relatedness to the mystery of Christ) man is an *insoluble riddle*.¹⁸

B 'Nature' in anthropology

Having established man's condition as a 'puzzle' unable to construct his own answer, we can now look in more detail at what exactly Balthasar understands as "essential and (relatively) unchanging in all man's acts and states",¹⁹ the "constant attributes"²⁰ that tell us about the essence (nature) of man (that is ultimately only fully comprehensible in the light of grace). Then we will consider 'what happens' to these constants when the specifically Christian illumination is shed on them. In other words we are looking in detail at his understanding of what nature is and what the nature-grace relationship is, in the context of anthropology.

Developing a recurrent interest in threefold schemes of polarity to describe the human condition,²¹ in the *Theo-drama* Balthasar settles on Erich Przywara's designation of the polarities of spirit-body, man-woman, individual-community as the three dimensions of man's constant attributes making up his essence or nature²² (thus providing an interesting indication of the abiding significance of Przywara for Balthasar's work). Although these are the fundamental features of his nature,²³ in themselves they do not resolve but deepen his riddle. They mean his existence includes 'either-ors'.²⁴ "In all three dimensions man seems to be built according to a polarity, obliged to engage in reciprocity, always seeking complementarity and peace in the other

¹⁷ Ibid. 342 cf chapter 3 section B above

¹⁸ Ibid. 345

¹⁹ Ibid. 335

²⁰ Ibid. 355

²¹ In *The Christian State of Life* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1983) it was *the feeling of shame, the awareness of death and the necessity of distinguishing between good and evil* that seem to be identified with the three foundation stones of our spiritual being. (85) In *Karl Barth* the interpersonal relationships of I-thou and man-woman are cited (along with culture) as examples of that particular, relatively self-subsistent sphere of meaning within creation that adequately upholds the relative significance of nature (KB 300). In *Man in History* it was Fesard's man-woman, Jew-pagan, servant-master schema (306-330; cf Scola *ibid.* 97 note 22)—no doubt influenced by Barth's extensive use of this model in the *Church Dogmatics*.

²² Th II 355

²³ Th III 283

²⁴ Th II 411

pole”.²⁵ For this reason he is pointed beyond the polar structure, crossing the boundary, and “defined most exactly by that boundary with which *death* brutally confronts him, in all three areas, without taking account of his threefold transcendence.”²⁶

1 First polarity: body/spirit

In this natural anthropology there is “a twofold and contrary rhythm”, integral to nature, in which the body rises to spirit, and the spirit descends into the body.²⁷

Man is unique in being material *and* more than material, in the fact that for him “bodily things are communicated spiritually and spiritual things bodily.”²⁸ On the one hand, the two poles of the bodily and spiritual can be seen to embrace each other only in a unity, man being spirit as the summit of a series of forms ascending from matter. However, on the other hand, there is also a tension, evident in the contrary pull of the two poles,²⁹ and thus an ambiguity, in which anthropology is forced to recognise that what appears to be a “natural polarity is also an unnatural dichotomy”.³⁰ This can be seen as a sign of dignity: “man ascends, leaving behind and transcending what is below him: he is the crown of creation and ruler of the world, and this transcendence of his ...coincides with a direct relationship to the divine: man comes from the divine and has been instituted by it.”³¹ But on the other hand “realistically speaking...the greatness cannot deny its inner ‘torn-ness’, its “*misère*”, where “spirit” and “flesh” are “at war” with one another, resulting in man being made “captive” (Rom 7:23)”.³² This tension is not a dualism between matter and spirit,³³ for man is a unity who “originates from below and from above and extends both upward and downward”, but a tension which, “to be

²⁵ Ibid. 355

²⁶ Ibid. (my italics); Th I 378

²⁷ Ibid. 411

²⁸ Ibid. 366, 419

²⁹ Ibid. 355-358

³⁰ Ibid. 358

³¹ Ibid. 358-9

³² Ibid. 359

³³ Ibid. 359 Balthasar offers systems like Gnosticism-Manichaeism and those of Klages and Scheler as examples of this. Bearing in mind the body-spirit tension described, Balthasar is well aware of the temptation such an approach exerts.

precise, must pass right through spirit's centre", a paradox expressed in the "age-old description of man as a "boundary", "*methorion*".³⁴

From this two alternatives develop. There is the positive understanding of man as the mediator between the lower and upper world,³⁵ and that he can make a kind of natural synthesis between the two, or there is the negative understanding that, because he is in the middle position, man cannot gain a precise knowledge of either nature, that the two are completely contrary to each other and he can only choose to relate to one or other of them.³⁶ In his middle position man has to make choices between the 'above' and the 'below', and ultimately this refers to the choice between God and the world, or between good and evil, although this should not be interpreted as a pure spiritualisation (which amounts to the hubris of wanting to be like God). Whilst "the fundamental demand *must* be for an upward movement...if the spirit is to be genuinely 'above', it must come 'down' into flesh: only thus can it bring the flesh with it, up into a true spiritualisation."³⁷ It is together with its physiological infrastructure that the soul has to choose the higher value.³⁸

The last barrier we encounter in our consideration of this essential feature of human nature—as in all three anthropological tensions—is the "ultimate riddle" of death.³⁹ Whatever his status as regards mortality or immortality may once have been, it is clear that somewhere along the line the decision has been made for immortality. In this current concrete condition how is he to choose immortality? What is the point of trying to fashion something "immortal" out of mortal matter? Yet Balthasar asserts "this *is* man's situation".⁴⁰ And so consideration of our nature's body-spirit polarity leaves man an 'open question'. He has no answer without Christ.

³⁴ Ibid. 359

³⁵ Ibid. 359-361

³⁶ Ibid. 360

³⁷ Ibid. 363

³⁸ Ibid. 362

³⁹ Ibid. 364

⁴⁰ Ibid.

2 Second polarity: man/woman

The tensions uncovered in the body-spirit polarity recur in a deeper form in the second of the essential anthropological dimensions “human nature’s sexual differentiation into man and woman”.⁴¹ This “fundamental feature of human nature”⁴² immediately brings the third tension of individual and community into play, the former standing “as a paradigm of that community dimension which characterises man’s entire nature.”⁴³ There is not room here to carry out an in-depth investigation of Balthasar’s distinctive understanding of the two genders and the creation narratives. I only intend to bring out the main points relevant to our current concerns.

Right from the start we are aware of the distinction and unity in this polarity. The male is *totally* male, down to every cell, and in empirical experience and ego-consciousness. In the same way the female is *totally* female. Yet at the same time both share an identical human nature, but this never protrudes “neutrally, beyond the sexual difference”.⁴⁴ Thus in the completed creation the human being is a “dual unity”.⁴⁵ As a human being man is always in communion with woman, but never reaches her and so also woman with man.⁴⁶

So in the pre-Christian understanding what is natural is caught between two poles and ultimately cannot be defined. On the one hand, human sexuality is embedded in the cosmic-divine relation which is both the projection and affirmation of the human sexual dimension, and, on the other hand, the authentic *theion* is understood to be the spiritual dimension, and this spiritual dimension is then taken out of the sexual at the inner-worldly level, making it vulnerable to ascetic suppression in favour of the spiritual or depreciation as inferior or demonic.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Ibid. 365; III 283

⁴² Th III 283

⁴³ Th II 365

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 366

⁴⁷ Ibid. 382

Balthasar maintains that the metaphysics of all cultures attempts to explain the male-female polarity as a fundamental rhythm of existence in the world. This is generally in terms of a heaven-earth relationship (heaven as fructifying and animating, earth as responsive), with the human sexual dimension frequently projected into the realm of the gods which is then copied and re-enacted by man (although Balthasar also mentions its inclusion in the all-embracing form of polarity implied by the Yang and the Yin). But the problem is that it is not possible to adduce a metaphysical polarity that adequately explains the difference of the sexes in mankind. Either there is a one-sided distortion (for example male is equated with spirit and female with matter) and subsequent inequality, or the explanation remains vague and undefined (in the Yang and Yin no primary significance is attached to the sexes). In the heaven-earth model this vagueness is inevitable because the relationship between cosmos and *theion* is itself “unavoidably fluid.”⁴⁸ If, on the one hand, there is one-sided emphasis on the *theion* as the prototype of the sexual dimension we move in the direction of the fantastic vision of sexuality in the divine realm as the model of this dimension. But if, on the other hand, the cosmic is the prototype of the sexual we lose sight of man’s transcendence as he becomes no more than a special instance, locked within the cosmos.

Genesis provides a phenomenology of the sexual⁴⁹ operating at the level of man’s *creatureliness*. The sexual differentiation emphasises creaturely contingency, one sex dependent on the other, neither able to be the whole human being on his or her own⁵⁰ and every human being who comes into being owing his existence to a sexual process. This biblical perspective confirms the enigmatic status belonging to man now familiar to

⁴⁸ Ibid. 368

⁴⁹ Ibid. 368-369 note 56 In keeping with his comments on the relation of the first and second Adam described in chapter 3 above, whilst citing Barth’s chapter in CD III/2 285-324 as a good example of a phenomenology of the sexual viewed initially from the perspective of creatureliness, Balthasar thinks that here (as in his treatment of image and likeness) Barth “succumbs to the temptation to pass over rapidly to the New Testament fulfilment (Eph 5)”.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 369 Sexual intercourse cannot be seen as an absolute union and the suspension of this contingency. In the second account the same point is evident in the fact that it is not good for the man to be alone and indeed he bears the woman within him but is unable to give her to himself. Thus there can never be an idea of a sexually undifferentiated or androgynous human being content within himself. Ibid. 370, 373

us from analysis of the body-spirit polarity: he is both similar to and distinct from the rest of the creaturely order and similar to and different from God. Human beings are created in the image of God and there is therefore a similarity with him seen in his Biblical revelation in terms of Fatherhood and Motherhood and the nuptial relationship with Israel, but there is also dissimilarity at the level of their creation as male and female, their sexuality being part of the sexuality of all created things.⁵¹ And so again we arrive at the conclusion that human nature cannot be understood from itself. Whilst “purely worldly beings reproduce their entire nature in new members of the species”⁵² will man and woman bring forth *images of God*? For Balthasar it is rather that the natural operation of the human generative power extends into the divine creative power “which opens up and makes itself available in the creation of man.”⁵³ Thus Eve’s recognition regarding her first born “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord” (Gen 4:1), indicating that the human child is a personal gift of God, not just a gift of nature .

The dual unity of the human being seen in this second polarity requires the archetypal image of Christ/Church to “radiate the fullness of light onto the creaturely copy.”⁵⁴ For these central features of man are made to be perfected in Christ, for as we have seen “the first Adam is created for the sake of and with a view to, the Second.”⁵⁵

As sexual generation (as the fathers understood it) cannot be separated from the context of death⁵⁶ and death is always connected with fallenness,⁵⁷ the essential man-woman relationship (as found before the fall) does not appear to include sexual relations, although what kind of non-sexual erotic man-woman relationship there may have been remains an open question.⁵⁸ Again this unresolved element points to the fact “the centre of what is human cannot be constructed out of itself. Man acts out of his role between

⁵¹ Ibid. 369-370 Here Balthasar follows Przywara’s understanding rather than Barth’s identification of image and likeness with the reciprocity of man and woman CD III/I, 288-329. cf Th III 286

⁵² Ibid. 370

⁵³ Ibid. 372

⁵⁴ Ibid. 373

⁵⁵ Ibid. 373-374

⁵⁶ Ibid. 374-381

⁵⁷ Ibid. 374, 381

⁵⁸ Ibid. 381

earth and heaven, and in heaven there is not marriage (Mt 22:30): there the Marriage of the Lamb is celebrated.”⁵⁹

3 *Third polarity: individual-community*

All men are present in each.⁶⁰

Here we again find ourselves in the arena of the ‘one and the many’ encountered in chapter four’s exploration of the coincidence of self-possession and openness to being as an image of the Trinity and in the relationship between concrete and universal in chapter two.

Each human being is a perfect member of the species “embodying the whole concept of what it is to be human.”⁶¹ Part of this concept is that everyone embodies it as an individual, excluding all others. As free, self-aware beings “each one in himself is something that excludes all participation by others. Thus the concept embraces an aspect that is common to all men and *simultaneously* exclusive to all men.” The aspect of incommunicability

is the precondition or reverse side of all spiritual communication. Not only does it require the reciprocal knowledge and recognition of the other as “other” but also the freedom to detach oneself from the totality of the world (and hence from the community) and encounter the latter creatively, out of the uniqueness of one’s own self.⁶²

Thus “beings existing for themselves simultaneously exist for one another”. Each “human self-awareness enters the dance at a particular time”, but not by its own volition.⁶³ It “can only be awakened to free self-awareness by some other free self-awareness”, as we saw in the inter-subjective models of the previous chapters. Here Balthasar is mainly concerned with the element of *shared humanity* (rather than with openness to being-in its-totality). In the *cogito/sum* there is the self disclosure of the radiance of reality as such which frees man to move towards it. There is also the experience of the identity of being-for-me and being-in itself, and, as it is an awakened gift-identity, there is the obligation “to respond in gratitude to an absolute identity of

⁵⁹ Ibid. 382

⁶⁰ Th III 233

⁶¹ Th II 388

⁶² Ibid.

spirit and being.”⁶⁴ Then there is also the call to shared humanity, for “free self-awareness experiences itself as an ‘I’ only when it knows that it is addressed and treated as a ‘thou’...that is, when it realises that it is admitted into the appropriate community.” And so it becomes apparent “that, a priori, the *cogito/sum* includes shared humanity”. This elucidates the paradox of the exclusivity of “for-itself” simultaneously including what is excluded in the individual subject as well as logically in the “concept of species”. “Precisely because being-in-its-totality has disclosed itself to him, and he has experienced the gift-quality of his own nature hence his relativity, his ‘response-character’ (E Brunner) and so the limitation of his nature, the individual subject realises that he is “for-himself-with-others”.⁶⁵ This essential relationship of the human community to individual human self-possession gives shared humanity an essential place in Balthasar’s ‘natural path to God’ through reflection on the gift of the free self.⁶⁶ For the likeness of the gift of being to the divine goodness upon which this implicit knowledge of God is founded, has been shown to be a gift the possession of which necessarily involves other human beings.

So Balthasar argues that both “shared humanity [*Mitmenschlichkeit*] and non-mediate presence before God [*Gottunmittelbarkeit*] are inseparable in every individual.”⁶⁷ The non-mediate is mediated through the medium of shared humanity. “The *theion* is open to view, implicitly given to every human being who attains human self-awareness”⁶⁸—but only in a veiled way because this accessibility consists in participation in being-in-its-totality which can only be had in the cosmos of inanimate, animate and thinking beings. “However, both as individuals and as a community, human beings incline to equate the *theion* that reveals itself in being-in-its-totality with the universe of beings, the cosmos”.⁶⁹ And thus the problem of death emerges again and we

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 389

⁶⁵ Ibid. 389-90

⁶⁶ cf Th II 285, 391; III 457; cf chapter 4 section B2 above

⁶⁷ Th II 391

⁶⁸ Ibid. 393

⁶⁹ Ibid.

can see why so often the spirit has been viewed “as the essential determinate of the human being”,⁷⁰ and both body and community as of relative insignificance; or the individual has been understood to have no eternal existence but will dissolve into the elements of the universe.

C The inbreaking of the biblio-Christian doctrine of creation and the heightening of ‘natural’ (pre-Christian) tensions

Whilst outside the biblical realm there is potentially at least a perception of the ‘non-absoluteness’ and the fragility of the finite in contrast with the truth and the repose of the Absolute which supports all else, there is no understanding of the world’s *createdness by infinite freedom*.⁷¹ The Biblical and Christian understanding cuts through this problematic understanding of relationship of *theion* and cosmos when it proclaims, uniquely, the sovereign freedom of God in his creation of the entire world (heaven and earth) out of nothing. “Both cosmos and man are now on the same side: they are creatures vis-à-vis the God who creates them”. All the “similarities” between God on the one hand and man and world on the other are cut through by this axis⁷² without making God remote and absent from the world and man.⁷³ Rather his transcendence is such that it gives a new angle on immanence; it is the absolute transcendence of the Creator who is close to and immanent in his creation.⁷⁴

So now man is face to face with his Creator. Indeed now we talk not simply in general terms of finite freedom on the one hand and infinite on the other but of “created and uncreated freedom”.⁷⁵ The doctrine of creation out of nothing makes the God-world relationship more precisely the creature-Creator relationship and teaches important features about these partners vis-à-vis one another.⁷⁶ It shows that the world is not an

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. 253

⁷² Ibid. 395

⁷³ Ibid. 395-6

⁷⁴ Ibid. 396

⁷⁵ Ibid. 397

⁷⁶ Ibid. 396-7

illusory appearance or a quasi-necessary emanation⁷⁷ and it points to God's absolute freedom, *aseity*, self sufficiency and thus shows that there is no compulsion on him to conceive a world, a 'non-ego', in order to conceive himself, or to create a world to prove his omnipotence and that he is love.⁷⁸ Thus the shift from natural finitude to Christian creatureliness "involves a total revaluation".⁷⁹ It is from this perspective that the creature's origin can be seen to be in this amazing freedom as we have discussed,⁸⁰ and not in a divine idea independent from God's freedom.⁸¹ It is for this reason that "the 'image of God' in the creature consists decisively in its *autexousion*, in the created mirroring of uncreated freedom".⁸² Meanwhile the criteria for using or not using this nature is found in the act in which man is given to himself: it is by looking toward infinite freedom that finite freedom sees how its finitude, its natural state, is to be fulfilled.⁸³

This opening up of the profound abysses of uncreated and created freedom in the biblical revelation only reveals further mysteries, showing that "the true nature of the idea of man, as seen by God", in fact stretches the 'natural' dramatic tensions in human nature to breaking point.⁸⁴ This is a 'supernatural heightening' of the various tensions in which, we have seen, man is stretched, an *Uberspannung* that is at the same time the answer to all these tensions. Balthasar considers this heightening under three aspects.

1 From 'out of nothing' to the grace of communion with the Absolute

Firstly there is the new revolutionary perspective on man's origin and goal. We have already seen the dramatic impact of his creation from nothing, but there is also the

⁷⁷ Ibid. 253

⁷⁸ Ibid. 397

⁷⁹ Ibid. 254

⁸⁰ Ibid. 397 It "has no ground under its feet but "stands above itself" (Augustine) in the sole Will of infinite freedom" (254); cf also 290, 314; cf chapter 2 section C and chapter 3 above.

⁸¹ Th II 397 Rather, as we have seen, the idea is grounded in God's freedom, being God's will for the creature that he has willed to exist; the creature's blueprint freely put before him. cf chapter 5 section C above

⁸² Th II 397

⁸³ Ibid.; cf 250, 284, 272, 292, 303, 313

⁸⁴ Ibid. 398

impact of his creation *for* infinity, of his supernatural goal. This means that his finitude is now stretched from nothingness to infinity. Christian revelation shows what no one could ever have dreamt of nor any religion or philosophy come up with: that he is created from nothing yet called to make his home in the divine. He “realises something entirely new”—and here we recall the passage we cited in chapter five:

God undertook that first communication of his being, whereby finite, self-aware, free beings were created, with a view to a “second” act of freedom whereby he would initiate them into the mysteries of his own life and freely fulfil the promise latent in the infinite act that realises Being.⁸⁵

The initial description of the unfolding of this orientation in the direction of grace is already familiar from our discussion of the dualism of gift in the previous chapter. This gift of creation, extraordinary though it is, is just the beginning. Beyond the participation in being belonging to all entities, spiritual beings have in principle access to absolute Being’s self-disclosure, that opening up of subsistent Being’s own free inner life in which the Giver of being gives his very self, an act which we have seen Balthasar refers to as supernatural (in distinction from the ‘natural’ constitution of subjects.)

Again there is no marked discontinuity between the first word of creation out of nothing and the further work of elevation to participation in the divine life which then continues in a deepening initiation into this participation. (The self communication of God to the creature gives him the first experience of the “glory” of absolute freedom which deepens as they are further initiated into the divine nature through God’s “Word”.) Nevertheless, this supernatural fulfilment does not follow on necessarily;⁸⁶ it is an *if*,⁸⁷ an offer, not a must, a free act on the part of God, requiring a response on the part of the creature. There is no claim to it.⁸⁸ Balthasar again offers us the analogy of the free self-disclosure of one human subject to another in which there is also no claim on or right to the knowledge disclosed. Nevertheless, even this cannot compare with God

⁸⁵ Ibid. 400

⁸⁶ Th II 398.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 399; 398 (“in principle”)

⁸⁸ Ibid. 400 “At the very moment when God freely discloses himself to him and utters his inner work, man the creature—discerning his own nothingness—knows how little claim he has to such initiation.”

offering participation in his life which is “‘fundamentally foreign’ and an inaccessible mystery”.⁸⁹

Now crucially this grace of God’s self-communication is presented as *communion* with Him. His self-gift to us is both *communication* and *communing*, a fact emphasised by Balthasar’s ‘play’ on the verb *mitteilen* (and the noun *Mitteilung*). This normally means communicate, but Balthasar also draws attention to the literal meaning, ‘share with’, by separating the prefix from the rest of the word (“*mit-teilen*”, “*Mit-teilung*”): hence (we suppose) the English translation’s use of the *two* words *communicate* and *commune*.⁹⁰ Thus God “opens up his own absolute being, communicating it and enabling us to commune with it [*mit-teilt*]” and “he enables the created spirit to grasp (*auffassen*) this communication, this communing (*Mit-teilung*), as what it is and what it intends, namely, participation in the Absolute”,⁹¹ (that is, in Jesus and in the Spirit⁹²). When God speaks, he opens up his *Wesen*. The communication is both verbal (“addressing the mind, explicatory”) and ontological (substantial). From the perspective of the divine this means “the Absolute bends down towards the creature, but it only reaches the creaturely level, substantially, by lifting the latter up, beyond itself and its entire natural substance, to its level, giving it access and citizenship in the sphere of the Absolute”,⁹³ this movement thus offering the answer to the paradox of man, that he can only fulfil himself beyond himself. From the perspective of the creature it means that as one destined to share in the divine nature he will be called to it recognisably, and is naturally constituted with the ability to hear and respond.

This heightening of tension also needs to be understood in the context of the analogy of being. On the difference between the pre-Christian creaturely tension and that belonging to the Christian heightening Balthasar does not reject the idea that it is simply the case that the former “prevalently natural relation has now become emphatically free

⁸⁹ Ibid. 399

⁹⁰ Ibid. 399/ TD II/I 366

⁹¹ Th II 399

⁹² Th III 131

⁹³ Th II 399, 411

and personal”.⁹⁴ Both views maintain the positive side of the analogy of being “that is, that the being [*Sein*] of the primal origins and the being [*Sein*] of the effects are to some degree comparable.” However Balthasar wishes to make more of the difference between the two perspectives. Turning to the negative side of the analogy (that is, the “greater dissimilarity”) he draws attention to the fact that this gains a unique force in the biblical and Christian perspective because all the similarities the creature puts forward are seen in the light of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and therefore ultimately rest upon an “irreducible opposition”, that is, the “out-of-itself” of the Creator over against the “out-of-some-other”, the “out of nothing” of the creature. For Balthasar thinks, as we have seen elsewhere, it is very important in the Christian and especially the post-Christian world view⁹⁵ to remember this aspect of the biblio-Christian understanding precisely when the Christian understanding of likeness transcends the wildest dreams of pre-Christian thought, including as it does “participation in the divine nature” and “being born of God”. Indeed the elevation beyond the creaturely nature to one transcending it absolutely, brings the enormous gulf between them to the awareness of the creature. Confronted with the abyss of divine freedom he experiences his radical creatureliness for the first time, aware that this freedom has drawn his being from the abyss of nothingness, that, as we have seen from the Greek fathers, the only “substance” from which the creature can trace his origin is the divine will (freedom), and there is no security or definition for him outside God’s free purpose. The elevation into kinship with God happens at the level of being and consciousness, but is never a substantial divinization.⁹⁶ It is a paradoxical state of simultaneous nearness and distance. (Indeed as we have seen from the beginning,⁹⁷ Balthasar thinks the one enhances the other: “the more the creature is found worthy of intimacy with God, the more deeply he becomes

⁹⁴ Ibid. 401

⁹⁵ There is a loss of natural reserve in the face of the *theion*, a weakening or extinguishing of the natural awareness of the *analogia entis* in post-Christian Titanism, that is the Promethian rejection of the ‘new God’ (Zeus or Christ) and man’s seizing of this divinity for himself, understanding himself to be equal with God. cf Th II 420ff Balthasar refers us to his detailed treatment in the first volume of *Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele* (A Pustet, Salzburg 1937).

⁹⁶ Th II 401

aware of God's uniqueness and incomparability, without his reverence turning into an inhibiting fear which would refuse the proffered intimacy".⁹⁸)

The mystery of the (Christological) *analogia entis* "henceforward determines all anthropology".⁹⁹ The distance (taken for granted by pre-Christian man) cannot be jumped over by man; the closeness, the opening up of the divine realm is only possible by grace—it cannot be opened by nature.

2 The intensification of individuality and community: grace as personhood

When this free self-communication of God takes place and man is addressed by God's word and given a share in his nature a second aspect of heightening takes place: the new quality of unique personhood is bestowed. This is a uniquely Christian category. It was unknown in the pre-Christian era and is sacrificed in all forms of post-Christian 'Titanism'.¹⁰⁰ "The person only shines forth in the individual where the absolute Unique God bestows an equally unique name on him",¹⁰¹ "person" being the "new name" given by God in the Book of Revelation.¹⁰² This new name indicates entry into a "supernatural" and direct relationship with God and the consequent receipt of personal call and complementary endowment. This bestowal is by no means at the expense of the community. The community is involved in and indeed built up by the unique endowment, the personal mission of the individual,¹⁰³ as we will see in the next chapter.

This unusual reservation of the concept of person "for the supernatural uniqueness of the man who has been called into a relationship of intimacy with God",¹⁰⁴ obviously raises a number of questions, not least who *is* a person. Despite the narrow definition of the term Balthasar claims that all human beings can share in it to some degree. He is

⁹⁷ cf chapter 1 section D and chapter 2 section B2 above

⁹⁸ Th II 401-2

⁹⁹ Ibid. 407

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 423 cf note 95 above

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 402 It is "unique because it is chosen by God". Balthasar quotes Rev 2 17 and refers to the new names of Is 62:2; 65:15; 60:14; 62:4; Gen 17:5; 32:28ff; Hos 2:3; Jn 1:42; cf also Th II 254. For the clear influence of dialogist, Rosenzweig, cf I 639, 645.

¹⁰² Th III 208

¹⁰³ cf Th II 404, 415

not withdrawing his earlier affirmation of the hypercosmic nature of every man: all are spiritual subjects. The question is whether these spiritual subjects are to be called persons or whether this is to be reserved to the man called through grace. Whilst Balthasar concedes the possibility of the former he stipulates in this case a distinction between two forms or ‘grades’ of personhood. Again mission (which we will see is intrinsically connected to person) is not understood by Balthasar in an “elitist” sense, but it is a possibility for anyone prepared “to break out of his egoistic narrowness and do the good for its own sake”.¹⁰⁵ This perspective simply fits with the understanding of a range of differing ‘grace-relations’ described in chapter five. Nevertheless this does not stop Balthasar leaning toward the ‘supernatural’ understanding of person as we shall see when, in the next chapter, we consider in greater detail this concept of personhood so crucial to Balthasar’s understanding of our intra-trinitarian christocentric fulfilment in grace as described in the *Theo-drama*.

3 The intensification of intimacy and the intensification of the distance of sin

Finally the new supernatural heightening of anthropological tension illuminates sin: “the new immediacy and intimacy between the called person and the personal divine life gives a new quality to every turning aside, every refusal”.¹⁰⁶

There is not room in this thesis to offer a full discussion of the treatment of sin in the *Theo-drama*. Suffice to say that whilst on the one hand sin and evil are treated with the utmost seriousness, in specific treatment of this topic little attention is given to the historical dimension of sin and the fall and there is some confusion between descriptions of the essential characteristics belonging to man and those arising from his sinful condition.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Th II 402

¹⁰⁵ Th III 529

¹⁰⁶ Th II 404

¹⁰⁷ When we proceed “on the basis of man’s realistic existence, as we know it” (the “current act” which includes aspects of all the others) it is difficult to clearly identify the fallen and sinful tensions in particular from amongst the various natural tensions our finitude manifests (Th II 336).

This is partly because of Balthasar's understanding of a progressive unveiling of sin such that it is only in the biblio-Christian context that sin really comes into play,¹⁰⁸ and both participation in divine holiness *and* the shadow of sin intensify in the law of *the reciprocal escalation of love and evil*.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, though, the fact that sin is 'located' in the Trinity overshadows quests for the root of sin in the historical stages of human freedom. As the world is to be located within the diastasis of the persons of the trinity¹¹⁰ so too is its sinful alienation. "The creature's No resounds at the 'place' of distinction within the Godhead" between the Father and the Son.¹¹¹ The Father's kenotic begetting implies such an extraordinary distance, a separation internal to God that it "includes and grounds every other separation—be it never so dark and bitter"¹¹²—including the distance of sin.

As well as being the ground of the God-world relationship, the loving Father-Son relationship undergirds and renders possible the godlessness of the world, even the existence of hell.¹¹³ In as much as the primal divine kenosis is a surrender of the Godhead to the Son it "manifests a (divine) God-lessness (of love, of course)."¹¹⁴ "As a result of creation" this

most positive Godless-ness on God's part has produced [*ergeben*] a negative godlessness...Man's refusal was possible because of the trinitarian "recklessness" of divine love, which, in its self-giving, observed no limits and had no regard for itself. In this, it showed both its power and its powerlessness and fundamental vulnerability (the two are inseparable).¹¹⁵

Here then sin is identified as the fruit of God's kenosis rather than the fruit of man's decision and in the light of this ultimate trinitarian ground the moment of human historical responsibility pales into insignificance. It also means that sin and death (and

¹⁰⁸ Th II 404-5; IV 167

¹⁰⁹ Th I 30; II 405; IV 56, 166-168, 338. The "vast abysses" thus opened up in the God-man relationship produce "the dimensions and intensities of theo-drama." II 405

¹¹⁰ cf chapter 2 section C above

¹¹¹ Th IV 333-4

¹¹² Ibid. 325; cf also V 101 and 479-481 regarding the influence of Przywara.

¹¹³ Th IV 325

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 324

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 329

thus we will see below, the cross too) is always ‘part of the picture’: God’s plan has always known of it and even took account of it in the act of creation.¹¹⁶

However this location of the creature’s sin and its resolution in a trinitarian context is in danger of overshadowing the significance of the historical and temporal and reducing the seriousness of sin. The creature’s no is located within the Son’s all-embracing yes; “It is the lie, which only exists by courtesy of the truth and has already been overtaken by it. For the Son in his kenotic mission follows truth to the end. Thus “*The creature’s No is merely a twisted knot within the Son’s pouring forth*; it is left behind by the current of love.”¹¹⁷ In such descriptions it is difficult to see what significance the human response of ‘yes’ or ‘no’ can really have. We will return to this question.¹¹⁸

D Christological grounding of the heightening

In keeping with the christocentric perspective already outlined, this new supernatural heightening can only be understood with reference to Christ. Under the heightening anthropology seems to slide between nothingness and infinity. But in the God-man, Jesus Christ, a new foothold as it were is gained, “a concrete system of co-ordinates”.¹¹⁹

1 Jesus as the concrete living of *Uberspannung*

The first point about this christological foothold is that it does not mean the obliteration of tension. Instead it confirms that the supernatural *Uberspannung* in man “does not inhumanly tear his existence apart. Jesus Christ proves that existence in this tension is liveable, that it is in fact “the solution to the riddle of the ‘Old Adam’ and brings release from his torment.”¹²⁰ Thus Jesus reveals true humanity. As we discussed in chapter two, this is expressed above all by the fact that he does not stand outside the analogy of being, but is the concrete analogy of being, such that this analogy is the ‘rule’ for all further anthropology, including participation in the life of God.

¹¹⁶ Th III 48

¹¹⁷ Th IV 330 (my italics)

¹¹⁸ cf chapter 7 section B and chapter 9 section A below.

¹¹⁹ Th II 406

¹²⁰ Ibid. 406

2 Christological representation and the doctrine of redemption

The second point is that *Christ embraces every tension and every distance*. This is central to Balthasar's soteriology. Whilst, unfortunately, we do not have space to include a full treatment of his doctrine of redemption which lies at the centre of the theo-dramatic action,¹²¹ we can briefly set out the central themes relevant to our concerns.

Christ's embrace of all tension and distance constitutes the soteriological representation (which has its anthropological point of departure in the intrinsic significance of the 'we' in the human 'I') that 'changes' the individuals who make up the community, through a Word of forgiveness that takes on the judgement, the dying and the death that has proved the ultimate riddle for man in his threefold polarity.¹²² Radically, for Balthasar this representative identification with human nature knows no limits and includes sin,¹²³ going as far as a descent into hell understood as a real solidarity with dead sinners in the lonely silence of the tomb.¹²⁴ By identifying himself with all that is anti-God he infiltrates the chaotic world of sin, so that, as the Father's forgiving Word, he can cut it from man and let it go back to nothingness. Thus it is in God's incarnation "down to the lowest depths and the furthest bounds" that man is raised up, transfigured and permeated by the Spirit.¹²⁵ It is in the resurrection that the Father shows this judged man to be his forgiving Word through whom the sinner is liberated, forgiven and enabled to share in the divine life, making the resurrection the new centre of anthropology.¹²⁶

Central too, to the 'mechanics' of our redemption is the fact that the exchange of life and death made possible by this radical understanding of representation is specifically located within the relations of the persons of the Trinity. This not only means that all

¹²¹ Th III 50

¹²² Th II 407-409

¹²³ Th III 241, 248; IV 241, 334-336, 339. In this respect he does not think the Fathers went far enough. IV 245, 250-254

¹²⁴ *Mysterium Paschale* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1990) 148-188

¹²⁵ Th II 412 Regarding dramatic resources for this theo-dramatic action of 'death on behalf of someone else' and 'the unmaking of Kings' ("descending into the deepest dungeons of the world" I 400) in I 392-408.

the persons of the Trinity are dramatically involved in the drama of the cross, as we find distinctively in Balthasar's theology of the cross and his understanding of the dying Christ's 'God-forsakenness'¹²⁷ (for grace comes at a price), but also that the whole redemptive plan is primarily understood in terms of the eternal relations of the Trinity.¹²⁸

As the world and its sinful rebellion is located in the diastasis of the persons of the Trinity it is precisely at this locus that its sinful alienation has to be solved.¹²⁹ God's commitment to redemption through the cross is *eternal*,¹³⁰ 'consequent' upon his creative will (which stands from eternity¹³¹), because this redemption is the guarantee of the goodness and the success of creation;¹³² it is what it takes to care for the vineyard of God's creation.¹³³ As the cross (like sin and death) thus has a significance before the foundation of the world, it is not only the incarnation of the Son that is predestined but also the suffering of his redemptive mission¹³⁴ and the gift of grace and redemption through the cross are connected intrinsically in Balthasar's christocentrism.¹³⁵ If the 'place' at which the creature's no resounds is precisely the 'place' of distinction within the Godhead, the Son does not need to change place when he represents the alienated world but does so on the basis of his very *topos*, that is his absolute distinction from the Father within the Trinity.¹³⁶

This 'intrinsicality' of the cross in the divine plan is primarily to do with Balthasar's picture of God, his understanding of the triune relations, such that we could say the redemption of the cross is not so much because of sin, as it is because of who the Trinity is. For Balthasar it is the cross above all else that tells us who the Trinity is,

¹²⁶ Th II 408-9

¹²⁷ cf Th I 429; III 216, 522, 530; IV 35, 327-8, 333, 335-7 (cf note 10), 349, 356, 363

¹²⁸ Th IV 333

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Th III 514; IV 360

¹³¹ Th IV 330

¹³² Th III 254, 514; cf IV 330

¹³³ Th III 516f

¹³⁴ cf Th III 47; IV 40; chapter 2 section A1 above

¹³⁵ cf eg Th III 14, 39, 493; *Mysterium Paschale* 12f

¹³⁶ Th IV 333-334

and, as we feel our way back from cross to Trinity, we see that *the crucifixion is strictly grounded in the immanent Trinity in the radical, absolute personal self-surrender that constitutes Balthasar's vision of the Godhead*. The conditions for Jesus' abandonment lie "in the absolute distance/distinction between the Hypostasis who surrenders the Godhead and the Hypostasis who receives it."¹³⁷ It is this primal kenosis that is the condition for the possibility of both sin and its solution, the cross. The Son's redemptive kenosis only exists because of this 'prior' intra-trinitarian kenosis of which it is the economic representation.

The 'distance' between God and God on the basis of the primal kenotic begetting not only *grounds* the distance of sin it *also goes beyond it*, so that the absolute loving distance of Father and Son in the union of the Spirit, (represented economically in the anguished separation of the cross), always overtakes the distance of sin. Thus the drama of redemption at the heart of the theo-dramatic action is above all else a drama of the inner life of the Trinity, the "primal drama".¹³⁸ The world (as we have seen) is created with the Son's generation, is his and has him as its goal and whatever way he is handed over to the world "is an integral part of his 'co-original' thanksgiving for the world",¹³⁹ and even if the world rejects him, the world is still his and has him as its goal. It is thus that the creature's no is located in and already overtaken by the Son's all-embracing yes, a blip in the surging current of love¹⁴⁰—although Balthasar maintains that Christ's representation does not *interfere* with our freedom.¹⁴¹

3 *Communio sanctorum*

Finally, building upon the unique relation between 'I' and 'we' in Christ that makes his representation *pro nobis* possible, the final christological aspect concerns the

¹³⁷ Ibid. 333

¹³⁸ Ibid. 326

¹³⁹ Ibid. (This is identified with his eternal Yes to the gift of consubstantial divinity.)

¹⁴⁰ cf Ibid. 329-330 This conclusion is perhaps the final implication of a systematic understanding of the creature as being found "within the distinction between the hypostases". (IV 333)

¹⁴¹ Indeed, in the law of reciprocal escalation, far from "the all encompassing action of the "Lamb as though it had been slain" stifling all possible resistance, the degree of rejection *increases*, as for the first time man resists being embraced by the mystery of the cross. Ibid. 11

communion (*Eucharistic* and *Sanctorum*) that is thus made possible. This dispels the tragic side of individuation in bodiliness,¹⁴² instigating a union which involves body as well as mind in pneumatic rather than biological medium, a ‘deprivatisation’ which establishes the sharing and working for one another of the communion of saints. The *communio sanctorum* is always mediated by sacramental communion¹⁴³ and Balthasar also speaks of an analogy (deriving from Origen) between the distribution and availability of Christ in the Eucharist and the openness and permeability that is possible among the members of the communion of saints.¹⁴⁴ In this way “we are ourselves by simultaneously making ourselves a dwelling place for others”,¹⁴⁵ a gift of self made in response to God’s self-gift to us.

Whilst we do not intend to examine the sacramental element further, here we encounter a crucial aspect of the new life of grace that will be developed below in our consideration of personhood. The new relationship with God is also a new relationship with other persons: communion is horizontal as well as vertical, a ‘supernatural’ communion clearly fulfilling the essential relationship between my ‘I’ and other ‘I’s (I-thou/I-we) that we explored in Part II and above in the relationship between individual and community (section B3). In this way grace as *communio* imitates the fellowship, the *communio* of the persons of the Trinity.¹⁴⁶

E The new christological rhythm

These “christological new departures” so heighten anthropological tension that they explode the proportions of the human being, whilst also fulfilling the fragmentary aspect of the pre-christian tensions. Pre-christian ‘moderation’ is replaced by the Christian attitudes of gratitude, humility, hope, boldness as “man discerns dimensions in himself

¹⁴² Th II 409

¹⁴³ Th V 483

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 373-4, 382-3

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 382

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 483

which, if he did not know that he could fulfil himself in God, he would despair of fathoming.”¹⁴⁷

To understand how this is the case we need to consider what specifically the person and work of Christ do to the scheme of polarity that has been used to describe the nature of man. The Word of God in Jesus Christ cannot be understood to avoid somehow this threefold rhythm, since he becomes man in a fully bodily sense and man exists precisely in this rhythm. What happens is that he enters the human sphere at one pole of every either/or “in order, from that vantage point, to go on to fulfil the other pole”¹⁴⁸ and thus establish a new rhythm. Let us see how this works with reference to each of the three pairs of tensions.

1 *First tension*

The twofold rhythm in which the body rises to spirit and spirit into the body “is not destroyed but overlaid by a primacy of the descent” of the divine into the flesh and thus descent is understood to be primary in the whole incarnational movement.¹⁴⁹ This incarnational descent goes right down to the obedience of death on the cross, with its ultimately ecclesial implications as a Eucharistic enfleshment. In this way the natural rootedness of the spirit in flesh such that the flesh is permeated by spirit and lifted up in the sphere of the spirit, is fulfilled “in the new supernatural rhythm in which God becomes incarnate right down to the lowest depths and out to the farthest bounds” where “the physical is ‘divinised’, permeated with God’s *Pneuma*, transfigured and ‘transferred’ (Col I:13) into the kingdom of the Son, and hence of God”¹⁵⁰ through crucifixion with the love of Christ. (This of course coheres with other descriptions of our ascent being overtaken by the descending event of Agape and brought to a fulfilment beyond our own upward drive.)

¹⁴⁷ Th II 410

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 411

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 412

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

2 *Second tension*

Christ's overcoming of death is explored in the context of the second tension. Here we saw the intimate relationship between procreating love and death. Now a love that is purely personal and free descends into this generative chain and undergoes a death that is also personal and free, so that the death (tainted by guilt) entailed by being a member of the species is robbed of its sting and victory (I Cor 15:55). This new process then is not *subject* to the worldly cycle but encompasses and transcends it, not as something *sexless* but as *suprasexual*.

The reciprocal fruitfulness of man and woman is surpassed by the ultimate priority of the "Second Adam", who, in suprasexual fruitfulness, brings a "companion", the Church, into being.¹⁵¹

This companion is brought forth from his death on the cross, like the rib from Adam in the deep sleep—not in an unconscious passivity, but "in the consciously affirmed love-death of the Agape" from which comes the Eucharistic fruitfulness. In this new man-woman rhythm of Christ and Church, as the Church is his creation, taken from his own substance, the relative priority of man over woman is an absolute one of Christ over the Church. Yet this is an 'over-fulfilment' of the first creation "for in the mind of God the incarnate Word has never existed without his Church (Eph I: 4-6)."¹⁵² This 'new' relationship is a completely human one; it is a new rhythm in which human beings can share, such that human fruitfulness need not only be understood in terms of sexual man-woman fruitfulness but can also involve a celibate fruitfulness. This is a stepping out of the cycle of generation (Mk 10: 29) "to enter the unique, supra-temporal, sexual relationship between the New Adam and his "spouse" (Rev 21:9)" in which God's Agape "becomes the all-inclusive total meaning of life".¹⁵³

3 *Third tension*

Thirdly the relationship between individual and community is transcended in the direction of the *communio sanctorum* as we have already described. This happens

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 413

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 414

through the transformation of the individual into a person, called and sent forth, with a dramatic effect on the nature of the community, all the members of which are enriched by his new unique quality (charism)¹⁵⁴ and thus the universality indwelling the individual is expressed. Like the communion of each individual finite freedom with infinite freedom, this “reciprocal openness of the redeemed” by no means involves the loss of individual distinctiveness. Rather this mutual openness and availability is “on the basis of the unfathomable distinctiveness of each”, for it is the mutual exchange of unique gifts which enriches the community.¹⁵⁵

Thus in this rhythm we see confirmed the affirmation of the heightened natural tension. There is a simultaneous intensification of both poles: the more unique and ‘personalised’ the individual, the closer-knit the community. This is not an understanding of communion based on a ‘spiritualisation’ of relationships, as was suggested by the scholastics.¹⁵⁶ It is based on the enfleshment of the Logos and the ongoing communication of the members in the bodily organism of the Church through the Eucharist, and on the fact that this enfleshment is an expression of his surrendering of divine uniqueness “to enter into the ‘form of a servant’ of the mere individual, for the benefit of the ‘many’”. It is possible then to share not only in his uniqueness but “also in the unique surrender of his uniqueness ‘for many’”.¹⁵⁷ The Christian rhythm of individual and community in this reciprocity of personal uniqueness and surrendering of personal uniqueness “becomes a concrete metaphor of trinitarian life with God, inscribed in the very structures of the creaturely tension between individual and species.”¹⁵⁸

The person’s self-surrender to the community can so personalise the latter that it is no longer an extrapersonal principle of unity beside and above the unity of persons but is integrated out of these surrendered unities, just as God’s unity of nature is not something in addition to the interplay of relations between the divine Persons.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁴ I Cor 12; Ephesians 4: 4-16

¹⁵⁵ Th V 485-486

¹⁵⁶ Th II 415

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid. 416

But of course this too remains under the analogy of being: however great the similarity between creature and God in the new rhythm of the Christian order the greater dissimilarity is not abolished, consisting as it does “in the fact that the created persons remain individual substances, each of which is an image and likeness of the Absolute Substance.”¹⁶⁰

4 Marian representation

We should add here that, in keeping with what we said about the essential feminine mediatorial role at the end of the previous chapter, the crucial ‘link’ between christological representation and this communion with God and others in him is a *Marian representation*. Developing the traditional understanding of Mary’s ‘yes’ to God at the annunciation as “uttered ‘in the name of the whole human race’”,¹⁶¹ Balthasar depicts her role at the foot of the cross in terms of a second ‘representative’ yes for those who refuse to respond.¹⁶² Mary’s openness makes her the only one able to receive the Eucharistic distribution of the Son as he is shattered on the cross. It is like a second conception in which she is both the bride of the son (their union, beginning in the experience of darkness and desolation, rending the curtain that separated God and the earth), and in which she is also the womb of the Church, where the seed of God is now “eucharistically multiplied—thousands-fold”¹⁶³ and “‘the new man’ is conceived and born”.¹⁶⁴ As we have seen in section D2 above, those who refuse to respond are “undergirded and sustained” by the Word’s representative death (“‘for sinners’ and on their behalf”), but for a full understanding of salvation we also need to recognise the significance of Mary/Ecclesia’s response for them, “as a source, representing them and answering for them, in her darkness, at the cross”.¹⁶⁵ The representative death requires a

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Th IV 360

¹⁶² Ibid. 358-361; cf Th V 345

¹⁶³ Ibid. 358; The Eucharist is the definitive ‘Word become flesh’ in the Virgin Mother, Mary-Ecclesia. (Ibid. 361)

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 359; “...in the second creation the Virgin is empowered to a new motherhood...she is to bring forth redeemed creation’s answer...” Ibid. 360

¹⁶⁵ Th IV 361

response and this too is representative, the response of Mary/Church for us and on our behalf.

Here we see the ‘extremes’ of both human freedom and divine grace in action. The interplay of the powerlessness and poverty of total self-giving and the omnipotence of divine grace bring about a supreme fruitfulness.

At the Cross, Mary’s Yes consents to her being totally stripped of power (Mary can do nothing to help her Son)...God, from the lonely heights of his almighty power, can take the ‘nothingness’ of unfruitful virginity (to which, in the Old Covenant, the odour of shame was attached) and make of it the fruitful motherhood of the Virgin with a fruitfulness that extends to the whole world.¹⁶⁶

This universally extensive fruitfulness is the distribution of the Son through the Eucharist—through which he thus definitively becomes flesh in Mary/Ecclesia—making her response “more fruitful than all the attempts on the part of the sinful world to fructify itself—attempts that are doomed to sterility.”¹⁶⁷ Such a response is thus the living enactment of what was said about the contrast between the ‘dead end’ of *autarkia* and an *autexousion* fulfilled through consent; it is the living example of the active productivity granted ‘passive’ receptivity. It is this many-levelled fruitful consent of Mary’s (to the divine birth and life-giving death) that makes her “a mediatrix of the graces of the Trinity”¹⁶⁸ and gives the feminine principle of Mary/church/soul such a central role in the rebirth of grace discussed at the end of chapter five, it being through Mary that Christ comes into the world; through the Church that individuals are baptised; through the faithful lives of such disciples that Christ is made known in every age.

F Concluding comments

So, in addition to the characteristics of the finite spirit formally speaking, discussed in chapters four and five under the topic of finite freedom, in this chapter we have described those specific to the concrete human creature, analysed in terms of the three tensions of matter-spirit, man-woman, individual-community. In the first of these

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Th V 467; cf 441

tensions we have that which does immediately distinguish the human from the angel: the body-soul tension, thus in fact completing what we might expect to find in a 'definition' of human nature: spirit, body, freedom, rationality, self-reflective possession and inter-subjective relationship—although there is no sense in which Balthasar explicitly connects these various aspects of his description. Meanwhile the second two tensions, man-woman and individual-community, cohere with the dimension of relationship and communion which we have already seen to be important in Balthasar's perspective on our nature. However this complementarity is by no means explicitly drawn out. Such a 'collation' of the descriptions in Section B of volume II of the *Theo-drama* (the 'formal' treatment on freedom) and section C (the 'concrete': man) in order to give us an integrated description of human nature comes from the reader's own analysis and overview. There is not a strong sense of continuity between the description in section B and that in section C. They seem to offer very different models for analysing our nature, despite purporting not to talk about two different things, but in two different ways (formal and concrete), the latter additionally being specific to a particular finite spiritual creature, although it is the same creature which provides the point of reference in the former. Whilst intersubjectivity and christocentricity remain centre stage in Section C, freedom is not so dominant.

It is confusing to find the central defining characteristic of man, that is his relation of body and soul, matter and spirit, clearly distinguishing him from the rest of creation, presented as just one central feature among three, the other two obviously different from the rest of creation in degree rather than kind. Very little constructive theological attention is given the soul, the spiritual nature of man, or the significance of the difference between matter and spirit and the singular situation of man as a union of the two. Moreover, there is no attempt specifically to connect this central feature of man's nature to the *imago dei* (discussed in the excursus immediately preceding the anthropological section C).

We have already seen how for Balthasar the unique and profound situation of man in relation to natural and supernatural is understood in terms of *paradox* or *dialectic*. Here in the *Theo-drama's* anthropology there is a marked preoccupation with *tension*. Certainly it is true that the initial picture presented is that of a *natural* anthropology, which, without revelation of its only resolution in Christ, is an enigmatic set of puzzles precisely because it is Christ alone who reveals man to himself. Even allowing for this however, such emphasis on tension in describing the essential characteristics of man is problematic.

Firstly, even if it is a philosophical anthropology that uncovers such tensions, they are all the same proposed by Balthasar (via Przywara) as the fundamental features of human existence and directly associated with essence or nature. That our nature (created “very good” by God) should be so *characterised* by tension is problematic in itself, but it is the first tension that is particularly contentious: characterising the matter spirit relation as one of *tension* is at odds with the repeatedly affirmed doctrine of the *unity* of matter and spirit in man.¹⁶⁹ Secondly, still heeding the assertions that this is a natural anthropology, and Balthasar’s acknowledgement of the unity of our nature in the face of gnostic dualism,¹⁷⁰ the emphasis on tension (even conflict) inevitably suggests that our nature is not only incomplete without the revelation of Christ but in some sense divided. Again, this manifests a confusion of the essential characteristics of our nature and of the same nature under the condition of sin.

Finally even ‘beyond’ the natural pre-Christian perspective in the christological resolution, tension remains paramount. Indeed it is intensified, stretched further: an ‘extension’ that is confirmed in Christ and results in the extreme and uttermost stretching apart of the Son from the Father on the cross. We shall return to this question of tension in the conclusion.

¹⁶⁹ This does not imply a confusion of matter and spirit in man, rather a dichotomism (material body and spiritual soul) entailing an intrinsic attachment of the two parts forming the unity of one nature. cf Fourth Lateran Council 1215 D 800; Council of Vienne (1311-1312) D 902; Vatican I D 3002; Vatican II *Gaudium et Spes* 14; Catechism of the Catholic Church 364, 365.

¹⁷⁰ cf section B1 above

Chapter 7

Nature-grace and personhood

For Balthasar, the freedom of human beings is the freedom of the actor who takes upon himself a role in a drama.¹

Who can show me the role in which I can really be myself?²

A Persons in Christ

Our survey of Balthasar's theo-dramatic presentation of nature and grace has moved from looking at 'man in God' (the title of volume II) to unveiling 'persons in Christ' (title of volume III)—the 'destination' of the theological anthropology analysed in the previous chapter. We need to complete our understanding of this tracing of fulfilment with a closer look at what is meant by being a person in Christ.

1 *From role to mission*

The question of person and role, of "who am I?" and "what is the task that justifies, fulfils, forms my existence (individually and socially)?",³ is fundamental to Balthasar, more so in the end than the question of nature and the human body-soul constitution.⁴ It is a question posed in the *Prolegomena*, first in terms of the 'world theatre' metaphor (which is found in ancient thought, climaxes in Christian drama and is lost in idealist and post-idealist theatre); and then in terms of modern concern with the question 'who am I?', as Balthasar marks out the transition from *role* to *mission*. His analysis locates role/person as a 'borderline concept' in the nature-supernature dialectic although it only finds definitive answer in Christian revelation.⁵

The world theatre metaphor is significant in so far as it understands roles to be apportioned and judged by a divine dramatist/director, recognises some kind of distance

¹ F C Bauerschmidt: "Theo-drama and Political Theology" *Communio* 25 1998 540

² Th I 47

³ Balthasar: "Another 10 years – 1975" in *The Analogy of Beauty* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1986) 226

⁴ Th I 481f, 493; E Babini "Jesus Christ, Form and Norm of Man according to Hans Urs von Balthasar" *Communio* 16 1989 449

between I and role (whilst being aware that it is a synthesis with a certain kind of identity at the heart of it), and perceives “the social involvement of each role with all the others”.⁶ Although sometimes the bearing of role upon person can be no more than that of slipping in and out of costume, in the Christian period, far from leaving the ‘I’ untouched, role “is what gives people their fundamental uniqueness”,⁷ a mission, personalising them for life in the world, everything depending on the way the role is played. The ‘I’s responsibility in acting out the role can be understood as a genuine counterpart to the Divine. Ultimately, Balthasar finds reflection on the metaphor’s content (the underlying metaphysical implications and the individual elements) more theologically fruitful than its direct application.

Balthasar divides philosophical reflection on the subject into two approaches. Firstly there are those that understand role as the *acceptance of limitation*⁸ (such as in stoicism and the various attempts of psychology and sociology to bring man to accept what he is, with its limitations). Secondly there are those that understand *role as alienation*⁹ (such as the neoplatonic path to uniqueness in the uniquely One through the loss of individual selfhood, or the idealist loss of the individual as person in the favouring of the ideal over the empirical ‘I’ and the relentless orientation towards the perfect integration of the individual into the totality of the spirit). He concludes that ultimately both approaches fail to answer the question ‘who am I’ because the ‘I’ is surrendered to an all embracing life/essence, and a necessary connection between the particular ‘I’ and life/essence is not adequately delineated. Finally he considers attempts to *mediate* between the two.¹⁰ There is the pre-Christian near East’s conception of the king who represents the deity to the people and the people before the god, but leaves other members of the nation indeterminate. There is the Italic understanding of the ‘genius’ which glimpses the “goal of providing a basis for the individuality of each

⁵ cf Th I 46-48, 129-257, 354ff, 481-648; “On the Concept of Person” *Communio* 13 1986 18-26

⁶ Th I 253

⁷ Ibid. 165

⁸ Ibid. 493-544

⁹ Ibid. 545-589

human being” but cannot reach it, being diffuse and ambivalent, neither fully identified with the human I nor set over against it as another ‘I’. There is George Simmel’s post-christian, post-idealist striving for a new expression of individuality in terms of “the individual law”, the essential ideal image of the conscious spirit “predicated of it as its very own, sprung from its very self,” an ‘ought’ that everyone carries within him—yet lacking the interpersonal dimension. Lastly there is the ‘dialogue principle’ pioneered by Ebner, Buber, Marcel and Rosenzweig in which awareness of my ‘I’ comes through discovery of the ‘thou’. This brings us to the threshold of the answer to the question ‘who am I’, for it points to the fact that a positive answer can only come from the vertical axis of revelation when the ‘I’ is addressed by God as ‘thou’, and, in particular, it comes as a summoning, calling and being sent, that is, as mission. This means the arbitrariness of ‘role’ as the draping of a colourless ‘I’ in whatever trappings are at hand could be left behind, in favour of “an ‘I’ that was irreplaceable as such”¹¹ and could be enabled to adopt a genuinely dramatic role in the real play of life. To this perspective, so influential on his own formulation, Balthasar brings the crucial specifically Christian content of christology and trinitarian doctrine: “only in Jesus Christ does it become clear how profoundly this definitive ‘I’-name signifies vocation, mission.”¹²

2 The christological concept

In Balthasar’s Christology there is identity of person and mission in Christ, an absolute and completely unique coincidence of role and person.¹³ The point of identity is his mission from God (*missio*), which is identical with the Person *in* God and *as* God (*processio*),¹⁴ for his mission as he-who-is-sent is not given him subsequently *a posteriori* but he must spontaneously have declared his readiness “before the foundation

¹⁰ Ibid. 591-643

¹¹ Ibid. 645

¹² Ibid. 645 Balthasar acknowledges the influence of Guardini, Mounier, Marcel and de Rougement here. cf “On the Concept of Person” 25

¹³ Th III 231, 533

¹⁴ Th III 533; I 646 (Aquinas); V 80 (Adrienne von Speyr)

of the world”.¹⁵ Jesus Christ is “someone who never was, and never could have been, anyone other than the One sent [*der je schon Gesendete*]”.¹⁶ In this identity the duality between ‘being’ and ‘seeming’, person and role that runs throughout the structure of man, is overcome.¹⁷ It is *in him* that mission and personhood take on some kind of identity for us. This is the relationship between the incarnate Word and human nature as a whole.¹⁸ And it is the gift of the Spirit to us, who mediates between the two aspects of the duality brought together in the non-heteronomous obedience of the Son’s humanity, that “can close the tragic breach between person and role in mission”¹⁹ enabling us to fulfil our freedom in carrying out the unique mission to which we are called.

The Spirit has always borne witness to the unique and peerless Son of the Father, but “the Son...can impart the Spirit to the players in such a way that they too, in an analogous way can be seen to be unique”,²⁰ giving each *individual* a *personal* commission, a task to do and the freedom to do it. So it is the bestowal of this mission that makes us persons.

It is when God addresses a conscious subject, tells him who he is and what he means to the eternal God of truth and shows him the purpose of his existence—that is, imparts a distinctive and divinely authorised mission—that we can say of a conscious subject that he is a person.²¹

This “happened, archetypally in the case of Jesus Christ, when he was given his eternal ‘definition’—‘You are my beloved Son’”; but we, who cannot have an exact identity between ‘I’ and mission as it exists in Jesus (for this in Balthasar’s Christology is “the irrefutable expression of his divinity”²²) have a personalising mission by being given a share in the universal mission of Christ.²³ “This personal commission...is actually

¹⁵ Th III 516

¹⁶ Ibid. 150

¹⁷ Th I 646

¹⁸ Th III 231

¹⁹ Th I 646

²⁰ Th III 51; I 641 (Ebner), 646-7

²¹ Th III 207, 263; V 392-393, 413; This is glimpsed in theological dialogism. I 628

²² Th III 207

²³ Ibid. 248-249; V 414

constitutive of the person as such”²⁴ because it is what God always intended for him in Christ, what he specifically and nobody else is meant to be.²⁵

So person is a Christological concept. We “can claim to be persons only in virtue of a relationship with him and in dependence on him...this participation is what makes conscious subjects into persons in the Christian sense.”²⁶ And this grace of incorporation into Christ upon which our personhood rests comes about as a result of his redemptive, representative identification with us described in the previous chapter.²⁷ As we enter into “the sphere of life and action created by the extension of the universal mission of Jesus”, that is, we respond ‘yes’ to ‘being in’ Christ (*en Christoi*), we stop living for ourselves and gain personality through being in him,²⁸ for the new life of grace involves an ‘unselving’ by being drawn into the life and death of Christ and being filled by him.²⁹ Our ‘nature’, understood as the freedom to make our own decisions and actions, is thus perfected by the grace of participation in the divine freedom through our incorporation into Christ, into the Eucharistic offering he makes in the Spirit to the Father.³⁰ Theo-drama, therefore, does not end with the Christ event, rather “a new dramatic dimension comes into being”.³¹ Christ in his role/mission reveals the Father, and now we as Christians ‘play’ Christ. We are a dramatic mode of his presence as he continues to work in his body the Church.³²

3 Grace as action for communio

He who drinks from the well becomes in turn a wellspring.³³

For Balthasar grace always implies mission.³⁴ The personal and personalising mission received in Christ is the particular grace of one’s vocation or mission.³⁵ It is a God-given

²⁴ Th III 51

²⁵ Ibid. 533

²⁶ Ibid. 207, 489; IV 406; I 641-2 (Ebner)

²⁷ cf Th III 241, 248

²⁸ Ibid. 245-248

²⁹ Th V 333-334 This is in the Pauline sense of Galatians 2: 20; 6: 14; Eph 2: 6; and Rom 6: 4; 6: 6; 14: 7-8. In purgatory there is a destruction of my ‘I’ to be returned to me as a new ‘I’ in God. Th V 364 It is here that the “definitive recasting of the ‘I’ is carried out.” V 391

³⁰ Th IV 406

³¹ Th I 118

³² Ibid. 118, 53

task in the world,³⁶ “an aspect of the grace of the God who is concerned for and involved in the world”.³⁷ It therefore implies “the social dimension of service on behalf of others”,³⁸ a ‘de-privatisation’ making “ecclesial room for others”³⁹—for personal identity in Christ always involves the community of those who are in Christ. The Spirit who gives *unique* identity/mission is likewise the “*socialising ‘between’*”, and the individual is sent to a stage inhabited by an ensemble of fellow actors into which he is inserted.⁴⁰ Believers thus share in Christ’s *pro nobis* and their theological personhood coincides with their role and influence in the community on behalf of others.⁴¹ On the basis of his *pro nobis*, Christ opens up “an area of Christian mission” in which individuals “can be given a share in his salvific work and suffering for the world”.⁴² The communion of saints, which we have already encountered as the supernatural christological fulfilment of the relationship between individual and community, is this ‘de-privatisation’ in Christ constituted through the pneumatological communication of something of Christ’s own personal concrete universality to the individual.⁴³ This “signals an unimaginable expansion, in the order of creation, of the individual’s sphere of influence”⁴⁴ in which there “is in principle no limit to the possible influence of one member upon another within the spiritual community of goods, both in space and time.”⁴⁵ The individual drama of the person in Christ “may extend to the whole universe, depending on how far it is prepared to co-operate in being inserted into the

³³ Th V 398

³⁴ Th III 349, 528; *Engagement* 38-9

³⁵ To be precise, there is a distinction between vocation and mission, “the latter is inchoately present in the former as its goal...but there are intermediary stages.” (Mark 3.14f; Acts 9:15f) Th II 267

³⁶ Th II 402

³⁷ Th III 528

³⁸ Th III 267

³⁹ Ibid. 527, 271ff; II 50 A number of commentators criticise Balthasar’s failure to develop this emphasis in the direction of a social theology. cf chapter 9 note 1 below

⁴⁰ Th I 647 (my italics)

⁴¹ Th IV 406

⁴² Th III 241

⁴³ Th II 50; III 349 This is in contrast to Hegel who only recognises the Spirit’s *universalising*. I 588

⁴⁴ Th IV 407

⁴⁵ Ibid. 413

normative drama of Christ's life, death and resurrection."⁴⁶ Thus living in the grace of Christ, that communion to which our nature tends, is not only a vertical exchange between us and God, but a horizontal exchange with our fellow human beings, "my being-in-grace (which is being-in-love) involving being allotted and possessing a charism, personal to me, for the sake of the community...having an influence that is ultimately universal."⁴⁷ This universal range of action, "the opening up of ever new and unimaginable realms of freedom and dramatic plot", is held together in Christ as the most universal because the most concrete.⁴⁸ The coincidence of universality and particularity in every mission means that the interaction of missions generates "a genuine and unlimited richness of dramatic tensions, conflicts and collisions."⁴⁹ In this conception the significance of 'who' over 'what' (nature) is again apparent:

The one addressed by God does not love the other person as someone who "shares the same nature" (like the stoic and the Spinozist) but as someone who is likewise addressed by God in 'what is most individual to him'.⁵⁰

So we see the centrality of the mission of personhood to the fulfilment of the aspect of *response* written into the gift of existence and heightened in view of the gift of God's self-communication. It is thus central to our 'co-acting' with God in the theo-drama. As we saw in chapter five the gift of grace and the response go together. This is central to the *Theo-drama*, constituting the transition from aesthetics to drama that takes the form of *election*, in which someone is called to a particular task:

When a person is struck by something truly significant, he is not simply placed in a universal perspective from which he can survey the totality: an arrow pierces his heart, at his most personal level. The issue is one that concerns him. "You must change your life", you must henceforth live in response to this unique and genuine revelation...Being touched in this way is *election*....no-one is enraptured without returning from his encounter, with a personal mission...God only shows himself to someone, only enraptures him, in order to commission him.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Th II 50, 51; V 178 This can mean a sharing in his suffering, as Balthasar witnessed in a particular way in the case of Adrienne von Speyr's 'paschal' suffering. cf eg III 241 note 43; also the reference to 'co-atonement' in chapter 5 section D3.

⁴⁷ Th IV 419-420. Dalzell thus underestimates the significance of horizontal *communio* (*Dramatic* 19, 263-277).

⁴⁸ Th II 271

⁴⁹ Th I 68

⁵⁰ Ibid. 638 (citing Rosenzweig)

⁵¹ Th II 30-31

This experience enables *decision* to be made regarding the commission. For election is not so much God's eternal gracious choice as "the effect of this call on the freedom of the person called".⁵² The key characteristic of this response is again *availability*, found archetypically in the Son. The genuinely Christian mark that Christ's dying imprints on human life is not so much in the direction of the ecstasy of love as in staying close to him, taking our cross daily and accepting whatever he gives.⁵³ And as the drama of response is ongoing, the yes or no of co-operation and availability or resistance and opposition contributes to the action of the theo-drama as the intensity of love and hate escalates towards the end.

In this understanding of the grace of personal mission we find the same complex relationship of toing and froing between divine and human action, in which the work of the Holy Spirit is always prior, as we saw in our description of the response to the gift of grace in chapter five. The Holy Spirit gives both a task ("a concrete plan of the future") and the freedom to do it ("the inner free spontaneity to carry out, recall and follow this plan"⁵⁴). We are thus *enabled* to act in Christ's acting area. So it is not as though we are like immature children made to trace a path already marked out: we can realise ourselves by freely choosing to follow the personal path absolute freedom has indeed "prepared" for each one of us, but prepared for us to follow freely.⁵⁵ It is thus that a full understanding of human freedom as the choice of the good, a choice of the true meaning and fulfilment that constitutes the deepest desire of the heart, is realised in the grace of mission.⁵⁶

⁵² Th III 266 In *Christology from Within: Spirituality and the Incarnation in Hans Urs von Balthasar* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1996) Mark A McIntosh points out the Ignatian influence on Balthasar's understanding of mission. "The yearning neo-platonic heart, seeking assimilation to its divine ideal, is 'Ignatianised' to become the obedient apostolic servant, abandoning self to the divine mission...what was a kind of necessary and inevitable process of ascent becomes...a free and historical activity of choosing." (43); cf also Dalzell: *Dramatic* 215.

⁵³ Th V 338

⁵⁴ Th III 52

⁵⁵ Ibid. 52, 44 (Grace is enabling) As regards the intuition of the world-stage metaphor in this respect cf I 253.

⁵⁶ cf McIntosh: *Christology* 124

4 The natural-supernatural distinction in the conscious subject-person relationship

By giving mission such significance for our destiny in Christ, Balthasar emphasises that this vocation is not simply some kind of accidental extra, but true identity, “the very core of our personal being”,⁵⁷ with which we receive our “own, inalienable, personal name”,⁵⁸ (that is, the “new name” of Rev 2:17, as we saw above⁵⁹). It is the ‘idea’ he has and has always had for us which we described in chapter five. However this does not mean that the personalising mission is derived from the individual concerned; it can only come from God in Christ: “election, vocation and mission are always pure grace”.⁶⁰ Hence we see emerging the same nature-grace dynamic. There is a distinction but also a dynamic relationship between individual and person. An *individual* of the human race, is translated to unique *personhood*;⁶¹ a *conscious subject* becomes a *person*⁶²; ‘*man in God*’ (volume II) becomes ‘*persons in Christ*’ (volume III) and so on. This is clearly a movement of natural to supernatural, in which, as Balthasar says, the man “who was hitherto an individual of the species at the natural level, is now entering a “supernatural” and direct relationship with God and so receives a personal call and corresponding endowment”⁶³ and the concept of person is therefore reserved for “the supernatural uniqueness of the man who has been called into a relationship of intimacy with God”.⁶⁴ It is “the grace of selfhood in God”⁶⁵ which does not obliterate the natural level of individual but perfects it by giving it its unique identity (for example, in the case of the apostle Paul, when Christ lays hold of his existence his conscious subject is left intact

⁵⁷ Th IV 406

⁵⁸ Th III 51, 155; II 402

⁵⁹ Th II 402; III 208

⁶⁰ Th III 269

⁶¹ Th II 210 Relevant too is the distinction between individual and person in “On the concept of person” especially 18-19, where the former is “primarily concerned with the identity of human nature” and the latter refers to “the uniqueness, the incomparability and therefore irreplaceability of the individual”, although the former potentially contains something of the latter; likewise Larry S Chapp: “Who is the Church” The Personalistic categories of Balthasar’s ecclesiology” *Communio* 23 1996 322-338 here 326f.

⁶² eg Th II 415; III 207, 263, 349

⁶³ Th II 402

⁶⁴ Ibid.; “In Christ it has been made possible for a conscious subject to rise above his natural level to that of the (“supernatural”) person.” III 208

⁶⁵ Th III 19

but Balthasar says he “has also expropriated him in order to personalise him”⁶⁶). This bestowal of the uniqueness for which we are made cannot be anticipated, but is something new and unexpected⁶⁷ (for example, nobody expected Saul to be Paul; John the Baptist’s name was a surprise and intervention by God).

It emerges that this personhood is in fact something that “comes from “the beginning of God’s creation” (Rev 3: 14)⁶⁸ and yet is lived out in time. In contrast to Christ, there is no *identity* between our eternal election and our temporal vocation and mission.⁶⁹ It has to be grown into.⁷⁰ Its significance will abide into eternity.⁷¹ As it refers to the supernatural uniqueness of the human vocation, that is a man’s call into intimacy with God, and since all have this calling, “every human being can share this distinction to some degree”.⁷² The greater the participation in the mission of Christ the greater the subject’s personal definition and the more universal his mission.⁷³ There is a mysterious tension between the fact that there is a *process*, we *become* persons, it is something *new* that happens, and the fact that we have been chosen and predestined for this mission in Christ before the foundation of the world.⁷⁴ Personalising mission is offered, and if lived out election can be fulfilled, yet in doing so what we become is what in God’s sight we always are and always have been.⁷⁵ Sin intensifies this tension on account of fallen nature’s resistance to “being and becoming something it cannot be in purely egoistic, self-regarding terms but only with the ‘communion of saints’”.⁷⁶

⁶⁶ Ibid. 247

⁶⁷ Ibid. 263-264, 267; V 145

⁶⁸ Th III 208

⁶⁹ Ibid. 263

⁷⁰ cf Ibid. 267

⁷¹ Th V 413ff

⁷² Th II 402

⁷³ Th III 207

⁷⁴ Ibid. 157 Eph 1:4f

⁷⁵ Ibid. 270

⁷⁶ Ibid.

5 The importance of grace as personhood/mission

Building on what we have already said about Balthasar's concept of 'idea',⁷⁷ one of the achievements of Balthasar's intriguing understanding of personal mission is the way it relates what one might call the 'universal' and the 'particular' aspects of the new life of grace. The concept of personhood appears to embrace both the adoptive filiation through which we share in the 'family life' of God that is common to all who have been made a new creation *and* the particular characteristics meant for each specific child for the sake of all the children, the unique particularity of the living of this new life in different people, the charism of their vocation. Becoming a child of God is simultaneously the giving of specific grace. Here it becomes particularly clear how the grace of communion with God not only does not jeopardise our own particularity, but enhances it.⁷⁸

Secondly, whilst sometimes the *Theo-drama* seems to produce an abundance of different categories and models that are difficult to synthesise, in this concept of person we begin to get a glimpse of how all these hang together. The centre around which all the forces of one's nature are drawn into a clear and definite pattern is the identity of person and mission in Christ from which human conscious subjects are allotted personalising missions,⁷⁹ and it is in this that Christ's archetypal quality in relation to us lies. We also find that the personal model is built on the *imago-similitudo* understanding used by the Fathers, for the translation of conscious subject to person positively "presupposes that the created spirit, man, can be an image (*imago*) of God" and negatively "implies that he is deficient and needs to be perfected and given a "likeness"(*similitudo*)" which "can only be imparted by God in Christ."⁸⁰ Man's correspondence to his archetype in Christ is indeed correspondence to the role, the

⁷⁷ cf chapter 5 section C

⁷⁸ "God 'does not put us into a uniform of love. He lets his own love, out of which he has created every man, be reflected in the particular way in which each person loves.' 'Thus the unity bestowed by the Lord not only preserves all that is personal, it actually promotes it where hitherto it was hard to recognise.'" Th V 108 citing Adrienne von Speyr: *Katholische Briefe II* 170 and I 227

⁷⁹ Th III 258

⁸⁰ Ibid. 208

mission given in Christ. Finally, the mission we have through Christ and in the Spirit to which we must correspond must be the fulfilment of the *aufgegeben* of finite freedom's second pole, for it is the ultimate *task* given along with freedom that can only be realised through christological mediation between finite and infinite freedom and in the liberating love of the Spirit of boundless freedom.

B Dare we hope “that all men will be saved”?

“Pardon’s the word to all”?⁸¹

As we draw to the close of our analysis of Balthasar’s description of our finite free nature and its fulfilment in the christological grace of personal participation in the Trinity, the one question that remains is whether the redemptive kenosis of the Word is to such depths, his death (and the complementary Marian response) *so* representative that in the end our consent is rendered no more than nominal. If this were the case the universality of grace would be such as to contradict the specificity that Balthasar appears to defend and to undermine the abiding significance he gives the freedom of choice in the process of adoption.⁸² The whole controversy as to whether Balthasar ‘believed in hell’ issues from this question.⁸³

1 *The universality and the particularity of grace*

Without entering a debate which is a thesis topic in its own right,⁸⁴ there does appear to be a tension between Balthasar’s inclusive emphasis and his emphasis on the particularity of grace, the specificity of being a Christian; between his emphasis on

⁸¹ Shakespeare: *Cymbeline*, V, 5 quoted by Balthasar Th I 470, 475

⁸² cf especially chapter 5 above

⁸³ John Paul II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Jonathan Cape, London 1994) 185; Balthasar: *Dare We Hope “that All Men be Saved”* with *A Short Discourse on Hell* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1987); Roch Kereszty: “Response to Professor Scola” *Communio* 18 (Summer 1991) 227-236; John R Sachs: “Current Eschatology: Universal Salvation and the Problem of Hell” *Theological Studies* 52 1991 227-254; Jan Ambaum: “An Empty Hell? The Restoration of All Things? Balthasar’s Concept of Hope for Salvation” *Communio* 18 Spring 1991 35-52; Dalzell: *Dramatic* 153-5

⁸⁴ cf Eamonn Conway: *The Anonymous Christian – a Relativised Christianity? An Evaluation of Hans Urs von Balthasar’s Criticisms of Karl Rahner’s Theory of the Anonymous Christian* (Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 1993)

human freedom and his detailed picture of the embrace of the trinitarian drama that enfolds everything else. We have seen that because creation takes place in Christ, every individual in the world has a relation to him, but the incarnational and trinitarian implications in the structure in which the I freely grasps itself do not involve a universal offer of grace that is formally and materially christological.⁸⁵ The universalist tendency issues from his trinitarian kenotic theology in which the Son appears to be the guarantee of a ‘happy ending’.⁸⁶ There is no distance between man and God so bad that it is not already ‘covered’ by the kenotic distance of Father and Son.⁸⁷ Sin is just “a twisted knot within the Son’s pouring forth; it is left behind by the current of love”,⁸⁸ and adoption, it is suggested, is given *automatically* with the surrendering of the Son,⁸⁹ such that the trinitarian drama of kenosis seems to overtake the exercise of our freedom. Yet on the other side of this tension there is the emphasis on the significance of our free ‘yes’ or ‘no’. There is the insistence that inclusion in the Son does not mean the play has been rigged,⁹⁰ and the understanding that God takes our freedom seriously to the point of a ‘loving latency’ out of respect for our freedom.⁹¹ There is also the stress on the particularity of grace and the choice of being a Christian which issued in the polemical critique of the concept of the anonymous Christian in *The Moment of Christian Witness*. Here the emphasis on the *decision* for or against Christ typical of the *Theo-drama* is presented as an *Ernstfall* (crisis-situation/moment), the choice in favour entailing *martyrdom*, whether that is the literal martyrdom of Ignatius of Antioch or the complete surrender of life in the service of the Lord in the case of Ignatius Loyola.⁹² There is a definite, decisive and unique character to the grace of being born of God, of receiving the presence of the Giver in the gift, that is not universally possessed, yet all

⁸⁵ Th III 457

⁸⁶ Ibid. 254; cf chapter 3 section D2 and chapter 4 section C3, D2 above

⁸⁷ cf chapter 4 section C3, D2 above; “However wide the dramatic acting area may become, we can have confidence that no abyss is deeper than God.” Th III 531

⁸⁸ Th IV 330

⁸⁹ Th III 254

⁹⁰ cf section A3 above; chapter 3 section D1; chapter 5 section D3

⁹¹ Th II 276; cf chapter 5 section D3 above

⁹² *Moment* 139-141, but *passim*

are made for and are in some kind of relationship to this state.⁹³ This tension is also evident in Balthasar's attraction to Barth's doctrine of predestination yet his concerns about its tendency towards a doctrine of universal salvation in which the freedom of man created by God is not taken seriously enough.⁹⁴

2 Towards hell as a gift of grace

Balthasar is clearly unhappy with traditional treatments of the human-divine freedom relationship as regards the question of ultimate damnation or salvation. (Here the possibility of eternal damnation on the basis of the creature's genuine freedom is naively juxtaposed with the possibility of repentance through the 'irresistible grace' of absolute freedom, without any reflection on what this means for the concept of God—as well as being out of touch with modern re-evaluations of human freedom and the origin of evil and its relationship to God⁹⁵). In *Theo-drama* V, having presented the arguments for universal salvation in a highly sympathetic way (for “men's freedom is not infinite ‘they are free within the greater freedom of God’”⁹⁶), and having pointed out on the other hand that “universal salvation seems to empty God's involvement in the world of every last trace of tragedy”⁹⁷ as well as failing to do justice to the sinner's refusal and the *mysterium iniquitatis*,⁹⁸ Balthasar seems to settle for a *hope* for the salvation of all, the outcome of the final act apparently uncertain on both sides.⁹⁹ Nevertheless the reader may well sense that he is much more inclined toward the former, for this is where the creative thinking lies—and the abundance of quotes from Adrienne von Speyr, whose pivotal significance for his theology is made most explicit in the final volume of the *Theo-drama*. He does in fact clarify his position a little further, but emphasises that this is very hypothetical.

⁹³cf Th II 315

⁹⁴cf chapter 2 section A1 above; Th V 270, 285; 494

⁹⁵Th I 48-50

⁹⁶Th V 284 citing Adrienne von Speyr: *Johannes* II 121; cf *Dare* 15

⁹⁷Th V 269

⁹⁸Ibid. 285 He is specifically referring to the reciprocal intensification of love and hate mentioned in chapter 6 section C3 above. In *Dare* the rejection of *apokatastasis* is clear.

⁹⁹Th V 290 This is in keeping with the position set out in *Dare*.

The thinking here is very much to do with the relationship between finite and infinite freedom and the fact that the grace-freedom relationship is not symmetrical, as we have seen.¹⁰⁰ For whilst Balthasar clearly acknowledges the possible reality of hell once a person persists in the contradiction of choosing himself as the absolute good, he sees “internal limitations and difficulties involved in the idea that man has absolute power and freedom to turn his back totally on God”.¹⁰¹ “While infinite freedom will respect the decisions of finite freedom, it will not allow itself to be compelled, or restricted in its own freedom, by the latter.”¹⁰² As our essence rests in the Word we are by nature (“prior to the realm of choice and to the sphere of our vacillation and irresolution”) “involved in a dialogue with God”¹⁰³ and the ‘curve of our life’ is enclosed within the curve of the Word made man. Even if we try to exclude ourselves in order to be our own private hell, we are effectively determined by the Trinity’s desire to reconcile the world.¹⁰⁴

This view point is thus of course also determined by Balthasar’s theology of redemption. Our judge is also our saviour who will “take every available path to bring back the person whose sins he has borne even if this person rejects him.”¹⁰⁵ The Son’s cross has space “for the (infernally) experience of sinners abandoned by God.”¹⁰⁶ His God-forsakenness¹⁰⁷ is for the sake of the damned. Whilst the devil wants sin but not the fruit of sin, Christ takes the sins *and* their fruits upon himself. The Son is prepared to walk to the very end the path leading away from God and thus he stands in the way of

¹⁰⁰ cf chapter 5 section D3 above

¹⁰¹ Th V 304

¹⁰² Ibid. 295

¹⁰³ Adrienne von Speyr: *Johannes* I 31 cited by Balthasar Th V 302

¹⁰⁴ “In Christ, the life of the Trinity is bent on reconciling the world to God. In this perspective, therefore, if a man tries to exclude himself from it in order to be his own private hell, he is still embraced by the curve of Christ’s being. To that extent he is still determined by its essence and meaning, which aims to communicate to the world the freedom of the absolute good.” Th V 303-304; “Whatever paths the particular may follow, they will be within God’s total Idea: for in the Son’s Cross God has enfolded and undergirded the most extreme courses the creature can take.” II 278; cf also V 342

¹⁰⁵ Th V 299; Christ’s death *for us* so undergirds all other deaths that there is an unavoidable objective relation of unequal reciprocity between his death for us and the death of sinners, such that even if a man dies turned away from God he is still dying “unto Him”. V 341

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 308

¹⁰⁷ cf chapter 6 section D2 above

the man who thinks he has gone out of God's reach—the Son is still in front of him and he must go towards him. Thus, without doing violence to his freedom, the hardened sinner's apparent inaccessibility is opened up by this appearance of God in the loneliness of one *even further down* the road of abandonment than himself (and there for his sake).¹⁰⁸ The cross thus “opens up a path whereby men get beyond their own refusal”.¹⁰⁹ In this view it is *sin*, “the unusable residue separated by the cross from the sinner” that is in hell, not the sinner (making hell a gift of grace).¹¹⁰ So whilst it does seem to be the case that an individual *is* free to reject God's love, it does not seem possible for this situation to abide into eternity. In the end God's infinite love wins over every human heart through the presence of the crucified brother who has descended even lower than the most isolated and forsaken sinner, “abolishing the limits of those who limit themselves.”¹¹¹ On this basis it would seem to be the case that Balthasar's thought cannot really admit of a definitive free refusal of God's love¹¹² even though this never entails the *compulsion* of finite freedom but a warming, opening up and winning over.¹¹³ However this description in Volume V has to be squared with the comments in Volume IV that “a sinner might so identify himself with his No to God that Trinitarian love would be unable to loosen the resultant snarl” and the plain assertion that “Scripture prohibits us from saying that this deliberate No is impossible.”¹¹⁴ Our conclusion can only therefore be that we are left with an unresolved tension.

Indeed, in typical Balthasarian style, the hope for universal salvation is not meant to completely annihilate the New Testament tension between judgement in the style of the Old covenant and the fact that Christ's death has reconciled the whole world.¹¹⁵ Such

¹⁰⁸Th V 311-313 (cf *Mysterium Paschale* 167f); Balthasar's dramatic resources point to the lowest role's centrality to the action. I 257

¹⁰⁹Ibid. 509

¹¹⁰Ibid. 314; *Mysterium Paschale* 174

¹¹¹Th V 314; cf Ibid. 313

¹¹²cf Roch Kereszty: “Response” 228; “...the love of God in Christ...is stronger than any resistance it encounters” (describing the history of a motif in Christian eschatology confirming Balthasar's own perspective). *Dare* 97 cf also 177, 208

¹¹³Edith Stein talks of “outwitting”. *Dare* 221

¹¹⁴Th IV 350

¹¹⁵Th V 316

tension is essential to the dramatic quality of theology.¹¹⁶ So this is not the easy hope of a straightforward doctrine of *apokatastasis*, but a hope for the salvation of all based on a brave and absolute trust in God's mercy that involves the sacrifice of total consecration to God on behalf of others.¹¹⁷ It is a hope "not without a certain fear", a hope dearly bought, for it

can only cling blindly to the miracle that has already taken place in the cross of Christ; it takes the entire courage of Christian hope for a man to apply this to himself, to trust that, by the power of this miracle, what is damnable in him has been separated from him and thrown out with unusable residue that is incinerated outside the gates of the Holy City.¹¹⁸

The last word goes to Shakespeare, Balthasar's love of *Measure for Measure* illuminating his own position:

Shakespeare...works toward a single final scene that occupies the whole of the fifth act: everyone is brought to judgement, and no one knows how it will end. The prospect of a happy issue is concealed from moment to moment, the scales of justice are handled gravely, and only then can the sentence be uttered: "I find an apt remission in myself" (V, I).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Th I 126, 128, 470, 478 (Shakespeare)

¹¹⁷ eg in the case of Thérèse cf Th V 320-321

¹¹⁸ Th V 321

¹¹⁹ Th I 470 He compares this with "Pardon's the word to all" (Cymbeline, V, 5) (which he quotes again 475), and talks of Shakespeare allowing mercy *and* justice to persist (for he "does not abandon the order of justice" 477), but the highest good is found in forgiveness. (478)

PART IV

CONCLUSION

Chapter 8

The nature-grace relationship in the *Theo-drama*

As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame;
As tumbled over rim in roundy wells
Stones ring; like each tucked string tells, each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves - goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying *Whát I dó is me: for that I came.*

I say móre: the just man justices;
Keeps gráce: thát keeps all his goings graces;
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is -
Christ - for Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.¹

A Introduction

We have explored in some detail Balthasar's 're-presentation' of the nature-grace relationship according to an intra-trinitarian christocentric perspective and in dramatic categories. We now want to draw some conclusions as to what this expression means for the nature-grace relationship, what happens to the content of the nature concept and the grace concept.

The first thing we have to acknowledge of course is that 'concepts' are not as centre stage as they were, precisely because they are not 'dramatic' enough. Focusing on *concepts* is an *essentialist* approach, and Balthasar has opted for a *dramatic* one. Nevertheless, Balthasar is quite clear that this focus on the person in the world in all his relationships is by no means in conflict with a focus on ontology. Personal and ontological categories go together.² This is a concrete focus on being in which

¹ Hopkins: untitled sonnet in WH Gardner, ed.: *Gerard Manley Hopkins Poems and Prose* (Penguin, Harmondsworth 1963) 51 (no 34)

² cf Th II 314

metaphysics has not disappeared but, is now ‘meta-anthropology’,³ a transcendental argument from man, working on inter-subjective ‘freedom-focused’ principles and in which, above all else, all realities are strictly envisaged in terms of their relation to Jesus Christ, who, as the concrete universal, ‘takes over’ as it were the place that conceptual measures may have had previously. Ways of talking about and categorising ontological, essential (‘of essence’), existential and personal realities are all referred back to his person, and thus we get less of ‘nature’ and ‘grace’ and more of first and second Adam, ‘alpha and omega’. We have often then in our discussion been dealing with the contents of ‘nature’ and ‘grace’ for Balthasar even where he is not explicitly using this terminology.

This is not to say that we have not encountered concepts like nature, grace, supernature and so on. They have as it were ‘support roles’. They crop up when discussion becomes specific and there is a particular need for theological and philosophical precision. It is as though we are reading a theology in transition, one dominated by a fresh way of presenting the truths of salvation but which still needs to fall back on the perennial terminology to make itself clear.

B Nature

1 Introduction

As we come to summarise the portrayal of the natural that we have encountered, let us first recall what we said in the introduction concerning the different but closely related meanings of the term nature. We saw how it referred both specifically to the precise ‘whatness’ of a thing (its essence, that which makes it the *sort* of thing it is, an intrinsic source of activity) and also more broadly to ‘all that is’, (that is, in a Christian context, all creation), as well as noting its particular theological usage in the combination, ‘nature and grace’.

³ cf chapter 6 section A1 above

We have seen the relevance of the ‘essence’ meaning to an expression of the immanence and transcendence of grace. As nature is intrinsic to an entity, it is distinguished from grace which is transcendent and by definition not inherent. (Although grace is not merely external: for it works from within and in this sense can be called immanent.) In Balthasar in particular we struck upon the peculiarity of human nature as having a fulfilment beyond its natural abilities to achieve. We therefore considered the relation of the essence of the human creature to a vocation transcending that essence whilst being that essence’s very own finality and fulfilment (the understanding of nature as paradox).

The second meaning (‘totality’) also had some relevance vis-à-vis the relation of the first and the second creation and the ‘natural order’ to the ‘supernatural’. This meaning plays some part in Balthasar’s discussion of nature and grace within the framework of Christ as alpha and omega (chapter three), as he increasingly adopts a creation-grace perspective. It is also relevant to his defence of Augustine over Pelagius (chapter five), based as it is upon recognition of the incarnation as bringing a new salvific fullness and not just the reaffirmation and strengthening of the first creation’s gift of freedom.

2 Development from the earlier work

At the time of the mid-century nature-grace debate, we noted that Balthasar, inspired by de Lubac, adopts the focus on the one (supernatural) end of man and his paradoxical character as a creature directed beyond himself, understanding the nature concept more dialectically, as two-sided (*Doppelsinnigkeit*), and calling for a greater awareness of the analogical relation of the philosophical and theological use of the term. He focuses upon nature in the concrete where there is a *de facto* unity between creaturely essence and the free gift of grace from the first moment of man’s creation and—as this is not a *necessary* unity—he simultaneously maintains the material distinguishability and distinction of the two orders. Nevertheless we uncovered a tension between this dominant concrete perspective and his intricate discussion of an abstract or formal concept of nature.

The *function* of the concept is clearer. It upholds the *qualitative* distinctiveness of the two orders and prevents both the ‘naturalisation’ of grace or the ‘loss’ of nature in the radiance of grace.⁴ This balance is expressed in later work by his avoidance of what we referred to as the ‘absorption’ of grace in the order of creation and the ‘absorption’ of creation in the order of grace.⁵ Any strict continuity between the two orders, or tendency to make grace an epiphenomenon of nature, or any christological restriction of creation is eventually confronted by the requirements of a theo-dramatic method, teased out in the ‘reciprocal causality’ of the two Adams and even upheld in his consideration of the relationship of the individual in the world to Christ. In the latter case he employs his distinctive understanding of human self-possession as an *imago trinitatis* with incarnational implications (rather than suggesting a formally and materially christological universal offer of grace).⁶ Meanwhile the understanding of nature as presupposed subject of grace set out in *Karl Barth*⁷ is of enduring significance in his mature work where nature as the eternally nondivine *ens ab alio* is conceived as “the receptive subject” of the gift of grace,⁸ receptivity being central to his understanding of the nature of the finite free creature. Nevertheless, as we have seen, he is far less concerned with the formal concept in the *Theo-drama*, focusing rather on what is referred to as concrete nature in *Karl Barth*. This is now expressed simply in terms of (spiritual) creaturehood, the conscious, free subject, and is formally considered in terms of finite freedom, with a concrete presentation unfolding in the sections on anthropology.

The attention he gives the abstract concept as abstraction or remainder in the earlier work is not developed in later work—although the (limited) place he gives a concept of nature *per se* is effectively as an abstract presupposition, in as much as the “receptive subject” can still be understood as ‘the minimum’ that must be there for grace to be received. However we have seen that his flirtation with a triadic ‘compromise’ along the

⁴ eg KB 281, 287

⁵ cf chapter 3 section D1 above

⁶ Th III 452

⁷ KB chapters 13-15, 17 especially 281, 285, 292

⁸ Th IV 374; cf chapter 5 above

lines of suggestions made by Rahner is not *clearly and fully* resolved in the *Theo-drama*. Whilst he does not develop the notion of supernatural *existential* which he uses in the article “Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie”⁹ (and raises serious concerns regarding its use by other theologians¹⁰) when detailed analysis is called for he still describes a ‘supernatural modification’ of our natural openness to the absolute¹¹ which is ‘*additional*’ to our natural finitude, yet so “deeply burned” into the structure of finite freedom that it remains even under the rejection of grace.¹² At the end of chapter four we concluded that this *supernatural, natural* characteristic complicated if not contradicted his otherwise straightforward understanding of natural desire as natural, and of the vocation to God as planted in the fundamental creatureliness of the conscious subject. It is, after all, the fact that natural desire for this vision is of the very essence of man that constitutes the paradox of his nature: unable to bring about this exalted end in which direction he transcends himself.

In the *Theo-drama* this natural paradox (prior to any supernatural element) comes to be expressed in the characteristic language of free inter-subjective self-disclosure through an *analogia caritatis* between man’s dependence on the *free* self-disclosure of his fellow human beings to be himself, and his dependence—as a creature made to be receptive to absolute truth and goodness—on the ‘unpostulatable’ free self-disclosure of God.¹³ We have also seen this paradox identified with man’s fundamental constitution as the *image and likeness* of the personal God for whom he is made.¹⁴ The ‘search’ that he is by nature includes reflection on this image and thus on the personality of the prototype himself, thus again rendering an elevating supernatural existential unnecessary, even though only the “light of grace can lift what is implicit in this reflection into the clarity

⁹ *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 75 (1953), 453-461

¹⁰ cf chapter 3 section B1 above.

¹¹ Th II 411

¹² Th IV 166

¹³ Ibid. 142

¹⁴ Ibid.; III 416-7

of consciousness.”¹⁵ The paradox of nature is of course central to the dramatic tension of the *Theo-drama*. For the very fact that it is strictly prior to any supernatural element (even though nature is made for the grace of the incarnation and its only solution lies there), not only uncovers the natural dramatic tension of human existence, but also draws attention to the supremely dramatic ‘un-anticipatable’ gift-character of the action of God in Christ.¹⁶ This ‘clean cut’ tension is emphasised in the *Theo-drama* (in contrast to the relationship between the a priori transcendental experience of salvation history and the historical Christ event in the uses of the transcendental existential Balthasar rejects). Nevertheless how this tension is affected by his ‘supernatural summoning’, additional, but not accidental to man’s nature, remains unclear.

Moreover, as the emphasis falls more and more heavily on the concrete tension between the creature and the historical Christ event, how exactly the tension between natural and supernatural in the original constitution of the creature from the first moments of creation relates to this becomes unclear. The tendency is either to treat this matter separately (and rarely),¹⁷ or, if we were to look for a key relating the two, we might find it in Balthasar’s consideration of different states of relatedness to the Christ event,¹⁸ in which case the original created relationship to grace would be one of these. However in his consideration of different states of relatedness Balthasar is concerned with *current* states, that is how people in the world in the era following the redemption are related to Christ, rather than the traditional ‘states of nature’ of which the integral state of the original creation is one.

Of course at the foundation of these different degrees of relatedness is the fundamental relatedness of our self-possession (in its coincidence with openness to all being) as an *imago trinitatis* with incarnational implications¹⁹—and this of course applies to all the ‘states of nature’ including the original one. However, as this is a non-

¹⁵ Th III 417; “The paradox is an integral part of the primal fact of self-consciousness insofar as the latter recognises itself to be a gift, and hence an ‘image’.” IV 142

¹⁶ Th I 128f; cf chapter 3 above.

¹⁷ eg Th IV 374; Th II 400-401

¹⁸ cf eg Th III 417; II 315-6

accidental relation, whereas as the original union of nature and grace can be (and is!) lost, treatment of this fundamental relatedness does not in itself help us connect the tension between fundamental essence and grace in their non-necessary union in the first creation with the concrete tension between this first creation and the second (fulfilling and healing) one in Christ. In the distinctly theo-dramatic discussion the tension seems inevitably to be in terms of the interplay between first and second creation—for it is the intensifying encounter between God’s love revelation in Christ and our response (the subject of the *Theo-drama*) that constitutes this action—rather than the relationship between essence and grace in their non-necessary union as established by God in the beginning.

In the *Theo-drama* then Balthasar rejects the supernatural *existential* as an explanation of man’s natural orientation to the contemplation of God and as an anticipation of the strictly supernatural, but when he talks of ‘getting behind the theorem’ this is to recapture the natural paradox of the creaturely constitution *not* to reject the notion of supernatural *existential* outright. This natural paradox does not straightforwardly eliminate the validity of some kind of supernatural *existential*: it is simply *logically prior to it*.²⁰ Balthasar shows that when it comes to it he still will not relate the natural orientation that constitutes man’s essence and its fulfilment in grace without introducing some kind of supernatural modification as a ‘third’ element, and he remains ambivalent as to whether we specifically call this a supernatural *existential* or not.

3 Formal treatment in the *Theo-drama*

The second part of Balthasar’s trilogy, to which we devoted special attention in Part II of our thesis, is a ‘*dramatik*’ because the God who *appears* and is contemplated in his glory in *The Glory of the Lord*, *enters into alliance* with us (in Christ) and his absolute freedom confronts the relative but genuine freedom of man. Here then we found a

¹⁹ Th III 457; cf chapter 4 section B2,3,4

distinctive understanding of nature, in accord with this theo-dramatic perspective. Description of the finite spiritual creature focuses on *freedom* in a rich, synthetic understanding, which is aware of freedom both as the intrinsic faculty to choose this or that *and* as the ('Augustinian') choice of the good in surrender to God. We understood this focus on freedom as an essential characteristic of Balthasar's theological 'project', providing a corrective to both classical and post-enlightenment diminishment of the free individual.

This primary focus on freedom in spiritual creaturehood provides some contrast to the classical dominance of rationality and to the more recent transcendental Thomist focus on the structure of knowing in the self-aware subject as the point of departure.²¹ In Balthasar's perspective the subject's presence to itself is important, but, as we have seen, this is never in isolation from an essential relational recognition of the *other*, and is immediately associated with the *geben* and *auf-geben* of the freedom belonging to the conscious subject. The responsive recognition of the other necessary to the fundamental

²⁰ "This paradox is prior to all talk of the 'supernatural existentielle.'" Th IV 142 Balthasar also talks of "the logical priority of the natural paradox over any 'supernatural existentielle'". IV 143

²¹ This divergence could be seen as part of a debate suggested by theologians such as Gerald McCool and Walter Kasper between contemporary Thomism (transcendental) and an alternative approach in contemporary Catholic theology linked with a revival of interest in nineteenth century Tübingen theologians (Mohler, Drey, Kuhn and Staudenmaier), whose response to enlightenment thinking is distinguishable from both the extremes of rationalism and traditionalism condemned at Vatican I and the 'restorationism' of neo-scholasticism that wished to reinforce dependence upon the prevailing scholastic synthesis of philosophy and theology in the face of secular intellectual developments viewed entirely negatively. (Gerald McCool: *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century The Quest for a Unitary Method* Seabury Press, New York 1977, especially 3-7; 241, 263f; Kasper *Glaube und Geschichte* (Grünwald, Mainz 1970) 9-32; *An Introduction to Christian Faith* (Burns & Oates, London 1980) 10-11; Cyril O'Regan associates aspects of Balthasar's understanding of tradition with a Tübingen model "Balthasar: Between Tübingen and Postmodernity" *Modern Theology* 14 July 1998 325-353). The Tübingen theologians preferred to develop their own synthesis of philosophy and theology in the wake of and in critical engagement with the intellectual developments that shook the period. Thus, unlike both transcendental and neo-scholastic Thomism, their thought is not 'driven' by a particular interpretation and application of Thomas (who himself gave rationality considerable dominance in his definitions of human nature). Nor is it so preoccupied with a mind-centred anthropology and the Thomistic theory of knowledge.

For Balthasar, as we saw in chapter 5 section C2, the work of Staudenmaier is particularly important, an influence directly relevant to Balthasar's focus on freedom. The rehabilitation of Staudenmaier he proposes is precisely in terms of the immanence of finite freedom and infinite freedom (cf Th II 333) and the emphasis on freedom in Balthasar's engagement with Hegel has affinities with Staudenmaier's defence of freedom in the face of his concerns regarding the impersonal logical necessity of the Hegelian system. (cf Th II 332; J Dietrich *The Goethezeit and the Metamorphosis of Catholic Theology in the Age of Idealism* (Peter Lang, Berne, 1979) especially 161; 170f)

possession of freedom is ultimately a relation to God, who gives this *possession* as free *gift*, (and who offers fulfilment of this freedom in the giving of himself (the Giver) in the gift (grace)). Such an understanding of nature is oriented towards *love*. The possession of my own free being is dependent upon the letting be of all other being, on loving it for its own sake, and it is directed toward the act of *thanksgiving* for the gift of being. In this way finite free being images and finds fulfilment in the love of infinite, free, triune being.

It is not the case that the question of rationality/reason has no place in this theo-dramatic focus on freedom. In fact, at the outset, Balthasar claims that everything he says about freedom is “indivisibly intellectual and volitive”, eschewing any “one-sided attribution of freedom” to either rationality or pure will.²² He implies that one cannot be envisaged without the other,²³ but in a way that could suggest the former is rather taken for granted,²⁴ an impression supported by the fact that the rational element receives no specific treatment in the *Theo-drama*, whilst nature seems to be understood in terms of man’s freedom “to make his own decisions and actions.”²⁵ The preference for freedom is perhaps most emphatic in the discussion of the *imago dei* with the suggestion that this is located specifically in human *freedom*.²⁶

Care must be taken not to read too much into this emphasis on freedom. It is after all to be expected in the theo-dramatic part of Balthasar’s trilogy, which, addressing the transcendental of the good, is an *ethics*, concerned with the human person as a being who acts, while it is the theo-aesthetics (addressing the beautiful) which is concerned with him as a being who perceives, and the theo-logic (addressing the true) which is concerned

²² Th II 210f, cf also 223 note 37

²³ He maintains the interdependence of understanding and will, the former necessary for anything to be affirmed, but the latter necessary to stimulate this understanding. (Th II 210) He also refers to Thomas’ relation of human judgement to free will (225), to the fact that the understanding of form as expression presupposes both freedom and *intel-lectus* (understood as insight) (25) and to Augustine’s understanding of freedom as “the rational, autonomous motion of the soul, in which the ‘I’ possesses itself in freedom.” (231)

²⁴ “The spiritual creature’s ability to make free decisions is an integral part of its nature just as much as its reason.” Th IV 374

²⁵ Th IV 406

²⁶ cf chapter 5 section C1 above

with him as a being who thinks, speaks and formulates.²⁷ Moreover, we have seen that aspects of Balthasar's theology of redemption and his doctrine of the Trinity can appear to call the significance of this freedom into question (we will return to this in the next chapter). Nevertheless, the prominence of freedom is a distinctive and interesting characteristic. Freedom is specifically identified with the fundamental openness to being,²⁸ as an 'inalienable core' that goes with our presence to ourselves,²⁹ and the axiom 'grace perfects nature' is expressed in terms of human freedom's perfection through participation in divine freedom.³⁰ Moreover, the very fact that Balthasar chooses to develop a *theo-dramatics* at the heart of his *magnum opus* only serves to underline the significance of freedom, which is the very presupposition of the dramatic situation with which he is concerned and is central not only theologically, but also in his very philosophical point of departure and his project of contemporary philosophical engagement.

4 Concrete treatment

Alongside the formal treatment of the spiritual creature with its focus on freedom, in chapter six we also considered Balthasar's analysis of the characteristics specific to the concrete human creature. This was described in terms of the three tensions of matter-spirit, man-woman, individual-community, thus distinguishing the human from the angel and, when viewed alongside the formal treatment, offering a full picture of the characteristics of human nature (even though we found the continuity between the formal and concrete treatment less than transparent). We also concluded that Balthasar's treatment of the body-soul relation is less than adequate – presenting it as just one central characteristic among three, not specifically linking it to the *imago dei* (which

²⁷ Balthasar: "Theo-logic: On the Work as a Whole" *Communio* Winter 1993 631 It is here, for example, that Balthasar speaks of *intelligence* as that which denotes a privileged place in the created world. Meanwhile in the summary of his thought in his "Retrospective 1988" the fundamental openness of human being to the infinite is simply described as the openness of human *reason* to the unlimited (my italics). *In Retro* 112, 114.

²⁸ Th II 211 ("...daß die endliche Freiheit als Offenheit zu allem seienden..." TD II, I 190) (It is thus both volitional and rational because being itself is both good and true.)

²⁹ Th II 210

tends to be linked with freedom or specified as an *imago trinitatis*) and emphasising tension more than a union.

In part, the confusion in the concrete treatment of the essence of the human being serves to emphasise how the focus of the concrete perspective is *Christ*, who is the concrete norm of all things. In the *Theo-drama* we have observed Balthasar develop the understanding that we only comprehend what is human with reference to Christ, and the suggestion that we only have personal identity in him, with all the intriguing implications for the concept of personhood mentioned in chapter seven.

Nevertheless, this does not entirely explain away the problems associated with this concrete treatment. We will leave our final comments on the predominance of tension in particular to the next chapter, but will reflect here a little further on his concrete focus.

The quotation from Hopkins at the head of this chapter vividly captures a conviction of the importance of concrete individuality in knowing what a thing is—albeit in an idiosyncratic and noticeably Scotist way. A basic orientation towards the concrete particular is characteristic of the tendency in mid to late twentieth century Catholic theology to move away from an emphasis on universal natures to focus on the concrete person. Of course, Balthasar's focus on the concrete, influenced by both Przywara's focus on "*das Konkrete*"³¹ and de Lubac's emphasis on the concrete as opposed to the possible/abstract, also needs to be seen in the context of and as contributing towards this general trend. Without calling into question this basic 're-orientation' or engaging in a detailed analysis of the thorny, age-old problem of the relation between concrete and universal, we do want to raise some concerns about certain features of Balthasar's shift in emphasis.

In the summary of Balthasar's theology and philosophy of nature outlined in this chapter, we have already drawn attention to a lack of cohesion in presentation (for example between formal and concrete perspectives), in the concept itself (because of his

³⁰ Th IV 406

³¹ cf chapter 9 section B2 below

preoccupation with tension and paradox and his own vulnerability to christocentric constriction, not withstanding his fundamental corrective of Barth in this respect), and sometimes in the very nature of the ‘concreteness’ adopted (the non essentialist, theo-dramatic focus on freedom being by his own admission a *formal* treatment that could refer to man or angel).

Our concern is what happens to the universal concept and its content in Balthasar’s shift to the concrete. Is the concept that concerns us, that of nature, really left any role?³² Whatever may be the strengths and weaknesses of instances we might cite of possible strategies to relate universal and particular in the *Theo-drama* (such as his discussion of ‘idea’ and of Christ as concrete universal—we will return to these below), the significance of a concept of nature is less than clear. We have seen the term ‘nature’ all but disappear in the constructive thought of the *Theo-drama* (having just a ‘support role’). The more concrete ‘creation’ and ‘creature’ crop up far more frequently and the who (person) question is favoured over the ‘what’ (nature) one. The fact that the subject of *Theo-drama* II section B (which amounts to a formal treatment of our nature) could refer as much to angels as to men is an indication of the lack of specificity in his treatment of universal natures.

It could perhaps be argued that ditching universals is precisely the desired purpose of a shift from essentialism. However if it is acknowledged that what *sort* of a thing something is remains significant, that what its *nature* is, what characteristics belong to it, are important, then universals still matter. The fact that we recognise that it is the individual that first and most strikes us, does not mean that the sort of thing it is has no part in expressing that thing’s ‘selfhood’.

³² The concerns set out here can be related to those of critics perturbed by a ‘supernaturalising’ of nature (cf Fergus Kerr in the Forward to Gardner, Moss, Quash, Ward: *Balthasar at the end of Modernity* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1999) 12-13; Noel O’ Donaghue: “A Theology of Beauty” in John Riches, ed.: *The Analogy of Beauty The Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1986) 4-6), in as much as we express reservations about Balthasar’s failure to give serious treatment to the *natura integra* of the first Adam and to make clear the enduring validity of philosophical concepts in the face of Christ’s role as concrete universal. However we do not share the view that the rethinking of the nature-grace relationship of the *nouvelle theologie* in itself amounts to a supernaturalism, and we acknowledge Balthasar’s attempts to avoid a constrictive christocentrism.

The concept of nature is important in the creation-grace relationship because it precisely maintains the necessary antithesis between the two poles. However much we understand nature to be orientated towards, embraced by, even “impregnated” with the supernatural³³ (such that we cannot abstract it in its pure state), grace is not *part* of nature, and indeed nature is still nature should grace be lost (albeit impoverished and deformed). Nature is by definition, not ‘super’ nature, not grace, however involved with grace it is in the concrete and however much it is always in some kind of relation to grace. For, fundamentally, this distinction of natural and supernatural is to do with the real distinction between us and God and the fact that our nature is not necessary to God and God is not a necessary element of our nature (grace therefore being not necessary to nature, and thus distinct from it, because we are not God). Although Balthasar acknowledges the nature concept’s role in maintaining the distinction³⁴ this does not encourage him to make more use of the concept.

The word creation cannot be as effectively employed in this way in order to maintain the distinction. In the first place this is because, if we follow Balthasar’s perspective, creation *is* this concrete forever involved with grace and thus is not effectively used to represent that which is not grace. We do not first have an ‘ungraced’ creation brought into existence by a Creator who then grants it grace. The act of creation establishes man (at the summit of creation) in a relation of grace (which can be lost). The distinction between grace and what is not essentially graced is a logical and not a chronological one and it cannot be adequately expressed by talking of ‘creation’ and ‘grace’ if we understand the act of creation to involve an establishment in relationship to grace simultaneous with the bestowal of existence. Moreover, Catholic theology has generally recognised that the gift of grace is itself created, seen perhaps most obviously in the case of the hypostatic union but also understood to be true of sanctifying grace. To use ‘that which is created’ as an antithesis to grace is therefore laden with confusion.

³³ “Theo-logic: On the Work as a Whole” 628

³⁴ eg Th III 482; *In Retro* 118

Perhaps most importantly, in our discussion of the relationship between nature and grace, nature understood as essence has been central in conveying the relationship/distinction between intrinsic, essential characteristics, behaviour and becoming and the ‘entrance’ within of grace from ‘without’ (in the sense that it is not a necessary characteristic). Here it is clear that the more concrete term ‘creature’ or ‘creation’ cannot be treated as synonymous with the more abstract term ‘nature’. Whilst nature refers more precisely to the necessary essence of a being, its intrinsic characteristics (thus the contrast with the non-essential characteristic of grace), ‘creation’ simply refers to what is created, ‘creature’ to some thing created. The nature concept is thus invaluable in describing that unique interplay between *human nature* and the grace for which it was made, but which is not possessed as an inherent characteristic by virtue of creation.³⁵

Moreover, the nature concept is able to specify the particular sort of created entity made to receive the grace of personal participation in the life of God. When applied to different kinds of created reality, ‘nature’ precisely identifies and ‘links’ the members of each kind and differentiates them from those of all other kinds in a way that the words ‘creation’, ‘creature’ obviously can never do, signifying as they do a fundamental characteristic shared by *all* creation, that is the fact of being created. In a christocentric perspective which focuses the meaning of grace on the incarnation the significance ought to be all the clearer, for in the incarnation it is not any created thing that is hypostatically united to the Son, but specifically *human nature*. Here we see the climax of the importance of the precision of the concept, for it is this adoption of our *nature* that makes salvation and therefore the communion of grace possible.

³⁵ This focus on humanity as the only part of the material creation called to personal communion with God remains valid when we recognise the perfection of the whole creation in relationship with God, mediated through the human creature, who unites both material and spiritual worlds. cf *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 355, 364

5 The nature concept's intrinsic orientation to grace and the *imago trinitatis*

The status of the nature concept in Balthasar's thought is further complicated by its intrinsic orientation to participation in the life of God, for this means that nature is far less tidy a concept than it was for the static essentialism of the neo-scholastic perspective. Relative to its perfection in grace, nature is intrinsically oriented to 'be more' so is not straightforwardly intelligible in itself. Distinctively, this dynamism is understood as an *imago trinitatis*, as we saw at the end of chapter four. We have seen the importance of our final 'divine definition' in Balthasar's discussion of person and role in the *Theo-drama*, which focuses on our identity and function (mission) in God's eyes, God alone knowing and giving us our true name. The dynamic 'being more' that characterises our nature (received into the 'ever more' of God's infinity through the correspondence of infinite and finite in Jesus Christ) is an unlimited openness to Being. It means man "cannot be fully made into an object" or be interpreted "according to a consistent idea",³⁶ but, as the image of God (who cannot be defined by a finite formula), only the revelation of the original can disclose his unity. There is no static, final definition of things because of the relation of image to divine prototype. For if everything is a particular *imago dei* "this image of God in things points beyond itself to the primal image" and thus can only attain definite form in the infinity of God to which it has a dynamic, but dependent relationship.³⁷ Each 'idea' is self-transcendent towards the Father as ground, because of its location by way of essence in the Logos (who is always with Father and Spirit), and because of the association of the Logos' generation with creation.³⁸ As the *imago dei* is specifically an *imago trinitatis* and in Balthasar's Trinity each divine person is himself because of his 'transcendence' towards the other two (the divine essence being 'ever greater' than each person), worldly self-transcendence exists as a reflection of this triune constitution (as we saw at the end of chapter four). This is why every finite being finds its meaning, direction and path "by

³⁶ *Science, Religion and Christianity* (SRC) (Burns and Oates, London 1958) 90

³⁷ Th V 101 with reference to Adrienne von Speyr: *Objective Mystik* 9

pointing beyond itself to the unfathomable reality of God”.³⁹ However, again here we have found that the search for the ‘trinitarian mystery’ behind a feature of worldly reality has led to provocative statements regarding the inner life of God, that is, to the identification of relationships of movement and development among the persons of the Trinity. Notwithstanding all the gentle clarifications of the difference between trinitarian and worldly ‘becoming’ and ‘event’,⁴⁰ again one cannot help wondering whether the explicit and detailed search for the ‘primal trinitarian mystery’ behind worldly process⁴¹ has in fact introduced an image of the finite world into the Trinity rather than uncovering an image of the Trinity in the world.

Concern about the ‘disappearance’ of nature in Balthasar’s theo-dramatics does not amount to a plea for the straightforward reinstatement of a static essentialism. If we are open to a christocentric perspective on creation this involves recognising that our nature can only be known fully in Christ and that a frank acknowledgement of our divinely established self-transcendence in the direction of the one supernatural end for which we are made means that what we are is still in a process of unfolding. Nevertheless, theological anthropology and a satisfactory re-working of the relationship between singular and universal need to be able to work with an objective, coherent nature concept. Balthasar is not unaware that even though our open orientation towards our prototype makes a tidy, consistent idea impossible, there are nevertheless objective features to our nature (a ‘perennial humanity’⁴²). However his description of this is less than clear and satisfactory. We have no unified, coherent sense of our ‘whatness’, but a scattered collection of characteristics which does not focus on the differentiation of different ‘sorts’ of things (for example, angel/man; creature/man).

In Balthasar’s doctrine of ‘ideas’ and his understanding of personhood the universal has significance, although (in contrast to the Platonist mysticism of the German Middle

³⁸ Th V 75

³⁹ Adrienne von Speyr: *Das Licht und die Bilder* 92-93 quoted by Balthasar in Th V 103; cf also 75

⁴⁰ eg Th V 67

⁴¹ Ibid. 68

⁴² SRC 12

Ages⁴³) the emphasis is on the particular (real and ideal). What each individual is (meant to be) according to the divine will is incorporated in the understanding of what a thing is (whilst there is a simultaneous intensification of unique individuality and communion with everything that shares in being.) We have seen this is arrived at by consideration of the *prototype* and that the whole question of the relation of concrete to universal is grounded in Christ as concrete universal.⁴⁴ Without entering into a full assessment of the effectiveness of this resolution of the problem of relating concrete and universal, we can see again the insightful application of christology to the problems of philosophy and theology such that Christ (as *universale* because all things are created through him and for him, made *concretissimum* in the incarnation) is clearly established as the measure and norm of all things, in relation to which all our concepts are imperfect. Nevertheless there does seem to be a danger that Balthasar's unswerving focus on the christocentric answer tends to leave our concepts out in the cold; what exactly it means for philosophical concepts, what objective validity they have in the face of this christological fullness is not clearly worked through in these pages. Without a clear philosophical insight for understanding the interrelation of concrete and universal in the identity of what a thing is, a turn to the concrete risks becoming one-sided—which is precisely what must be avoided if a turn to the singular is not to become nominalist or subjectivist. Moreover, there is also a danger that, rather than Christ, as *concretissimum*, being so universal that there is room for every valid concept (as we were assured in *Karl Barth*⁴⁵), in fact all ideas do not so much find room within Christ as concrete universal as become continually reduced to the dazzling prototype.

6 *Process meets paradox*

Finally although a dynamic concept of nature is clearly important for von Balthasar, and finality, what we are meant to be, is central in his understanding of our 'whatness', he

⁴³ For this approach tended to see in the idea what is common to the species. Th V 388

⁴⁴ Like all finite reality, the relationship of species and individual has a trinitarian constitution, according to which it is understood as a remote reflection of the simultaneous identity of each divine person with the divine essence and the distinction of each person from the other two. Th V 103; 67f

nevertheless keeps running a noticeable 'line' through the process of becoming that links our nature and its end. This is partly due to his employment of the double-sided concept of nature which understandably thus protects grace from being considered a 'right' of nature just because it is necessary to our full development. More than this, though, we have seen that it tends to divide the becoming of our self-transcendent nature into separate 'moments', breaking up what might otherwise be a more organic vision of our growth to fulfilment. One wonders whether Balthasar has really taken his recognition of the centrality of our finality as the fullness of what we are for understanding what we are to its full implications, partly, no doubt, because this could have sounded so very like a resurrection of Bainism, but partly too because of his preoccupation with paradox, dialectic and tension. Without this the central insight might be developed in a much clearer and natural way (without for example needing to have recourse to the supernatural existential.) This is our concern in the next half of this chapter where, turning our attention to making conclusions about his treatment of grace, we suggest that the most effective and authentic aspects of Balthasar's perspective on nature and grace are hampered from developing to their final conclusion by an unnecessary, anxious preoccupation with this 'line', this tension or paradox between what we possess by nature and what we are naturally meant to receive and to be (which comes by grace alone).

⁴⁵ cf chapter 2 section D above

C Grace

Communio, however, is the primal mystery, namely that God, out of his freely bestowed love, allows that which is not God to participate in all the treasures of his love; and this comes about in a reciprocity which, in Christian revelation, has again to be grounded in God (in the Trinity), yet without abolishing the creatureliness of the creature.⁴⁶

If we now draw together our examination of grace in Balthasar's earlier work and in the *Theo-drama*, what conclusions can we make?

1 Development from the earlier work

In chapter one we found Balthasar proposing in his mid-century work that we define grace not so much in terms of nature (as 'what is not nature'), but as it is revealed in its own inner essence, and hence from the perspective of faith. The understanding of grace that ensues is one in which *participation* is emphasised. It has ontic and noetic dimensions; it has the quality of a personal relationship and of an event. The element of varying degrees of closeness and moving away (under the dynamic analogy of being) is discussed in more detail in the *Theo-drama*, quite specifically in the short section devoted to grace in *Theo-drama II*⁴⁷ and more generally with reference to the 'inner path' to God in finite free being created in Christ⁴⁸ and as regards the connected christological understanding of personhood (to which all have some kind of possession). The dramatic 'space' in grace for greater and lesser closeness and distance is elucidated by the persistence of drama in the arena of grace.⁴⁹

The firm conviction expressed in the earlier work that emphatic recognition of the union of nature and grace in the concrete creation in no way permits derivation of grace from creation (against Baius) and that the gratuitous giving of God in the act of creation and the actual grace of his supernatural disclosure must be distinguished (against Pelagius) is exemplified in his later defence of Augustine over Pelagius in *Theo-drama IV* and is developed in his exposition of grace in the *Theo-drama* as a whole. However his

⁴⁶Th II 127

⁴⁷Ibid. 312-316

⁴⁸chapter 4 section B above

move towards the consistently and explicitly christological framing of the question and the adoption of a theo-dramatic perspective considerably affect his expression of this, as well as his specific descriptions of grace.

2 The theo-dramatic, intra-trinitarian perspective

The emerging christocentric treatment in *Karl Barth* becomes in the mature work more exclusively Christ-centred. We encounter a thoroughgoing application of the early christological insight that Christ is the sole measure of the nature-grace relationship and the concrete analogy of being. This includes an apparent disassociation from Pryzwara's emphasis on radical difference in the analogy of being in favour of focusing upon the relationship of the human and divine in Christ as the key to the theodramatic interpretation of grace (although we have found that radical difference does remain central for Balthasar,⁵⁰ and that he himself gives little attention to the distinctive nature of the union of the two orders in Christ—the very relationship that is proposed as the measure of the nature-grace relationship.) Crucially the relation of christology to trinitarian doctrine is far more explicit and thoroughly developed, such that ultimately the whole question finds its definitive location in the relation of the persons of the Trinity.

The grace of participation is emphatically a *communio*—in relation to Christ (by whom and in whom such a sharing in the life of God is possible) but also now more specifically in relation to the Spirit who brings us into this state of *theosis*. It is thus an indwelling of the Trinity, as well as a new relation in God to all other persons reborn in grace. That this latter horizontal-ecclesial dimension is essential is emphasised in the description of the new life of grace as personalising mission, inserted into and thus authentically imaging the kind of sharing in the divine life that belongs to the persons of the Trinity. A central feature of the theo-dramatic perspective is that the grace of communion is understood in terms of *freedom*: “the freely given indwelling of infinite

⁴⁹cf chapter 5 section D2,3 above

⁵⁰ We will return to this issue in the next chapter.

freedom in finite freedom”⁵¹, or more specifically “the reciprocal immanence of finite and infinite freedom”,⁵² “finite freedom’s non-heteronomy within the absolute character of infinite freedom”.⁵³ In that other central feature of theo-dramatic description, the phraseology of ‘gift’, we find this immanence expressed as ‘the presence of the Giver (God) in the gift (finite free being)’.⁵⁴

This depiction of grace in terms of the mutual indwelling of the two freedoms has to be elucidated christologically because it is *in the very person* of Christ, in the relationship of humanity and divinity in the incarnation, that this “reciprocal interpenetration” of finite and infinite actually takes place—the relationship between his human and his divine will thus constituting the climax of the relationship between finite and infinite freedom and the heart of the *Theo-drama* (in accordance with Maximus the Confessor’s understanding of this christological mediation as “man’s ascent within God’s correlative descent in Christ.”⁵⁵) The pneumatological description of grace is theodramatic too, attention being drawn to Augustine’s understanding that the Spirit *is* freedom, understood as *gift, grace*,⁵⁶ with Balthasar’s portrayal of Christian freedom in terms of *theonomy* specifically elucidated with reference to the person and work of the Spirit.

In that other distinctive feature of the theo-dramatic presentation of grace, Balthasar’s understanding of personhood as the grace of self-hood in God, the christological and pneumatological aspects are also clearly delineated. We are persons *in Christ* (supernatural) and it is the *Spirit* who inserts us into the ‘idea’ held for us in Christ, allocates to us the personhood that is to be ours in him and communicates divine grace and divine mission, operating in the area between us and God.⁵⁷ It is especially

⁵¹ Th II 232

⁵² Th IV 383

⁵³ Th II 333

⁵⁴ cf chapter 5 above and especially Th II 314

⁵⁵ Th IV 382; cf chapter 5 section D1 above

⁵⁶ The association of grace and the Spirit is particularly marked in Balthasar’s description of grace as “the presence of the Giver in the gift”, because for Balthasar the Spirit *is* “God’s perfect gift character” and “the absolute divine gift” Th II 315; II 287; V 65; cf chapter five above.

⁵⁷ Th III 486, 510

this understanding of the effect of our communion with God in Christ through the Holy Spirit that emphasises the horizontal implications of our new status in relation to God, our share in Christ's mission facilitating a participation in his *pro nobis* in the form of a vocation in the service of others. The communion that makes us persons in Christ always works in the direction of the communion of saints and shows the importance of 'grace in action'.

This christocentric and pneumocentric perspective is of course strongly intra-trinitarian. We have seen (in chapter five) that the Spirit-initiated participation in Christ/Christ in us is a *tri-personal* indwelling. More specifically, we could say we are being christo-pneumatologically drawn into a relationship with the Father,⁵⁸ and for Balthasar in the *Theo-drama* the ultimate description of grace as participation is as a *participation in the triune processions*. We have seen that our relationship to God is understood through close reference to the relationship of God to Himself, that is, his triunity. Just as our creation, our nature, the operation of our freedom and so on are again and again referred back to *the* drama, that is the inter-personal relationships of the immanent Trinity, so too Balthasar explores how the offer of grace is related to 'events' within the Trinity. Our rebirth in grace ("being born of God") is presented as an adoption into the Son's begetting from the Father into which we are drawn by Christ through his 'begetting' in us, that is through his incarnation in the virgin and then in the Church.

So in the *Theo-drama* the offer of grace continues to embrace ontic, noetic and personal dimensions. As we saw in chapter five (section B), it is an offer of *being* (a substantial participation in the divine nature⁵⁹), but not as some "thing";⁶⁰ and it is an offer of *love*,⁶¹ God's personal self-giving, elucidated by the pneumatological focus (the Holy Spirit being the gift of God's own love to us⁶²) and the christocentric focus

⁵⁸ cf Th III 454-5

⁵⁹ Th II 399

⁶⁰ Ibid. 315

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. 230, 233, 287; V65

(because in the divine self-revelation in Christ God's very being coincides with his "being gift" and his "being love".⁶³) This description, like 'the presence of the Giver in the gift', emphasises the immediate, personal dimension without going beyond the bounds of the concerns enshrined in the distinction between created and uncreated grace, Christ being the very synthesis of created and uncreated. (All the same Balthasar's slightly ambivalent employment of the basically Eckhartian understanding of "being born of God" raises questions regarding the distinction between created and uncreated, that is, between the eternal sonship of the Logos and the adoptive sonship of the divinized creature. We shall return to this.)

This description of grace as the self-offering of divine being as gift and love is very important in the *Theo-drama* where there is a natural emphasis on understanding grace in terms of the love of the Good, (rather than, say, the glory of the Beautiful). The dominant theme of the *Theo-drama* (the immanent involvement of the transcendent God in the world) is presented in terms of the revelation and communication of God as *love*⁶⁴ in such a way that it is understood and the recipients are enabled to reproduce it within themselves⁶⁵ (as we saw with the work of the Spirit and discussed in our description of the human response to grace with its mariological model in chapter five.) As in *Karl Barth* Balthasar's recognition of the ontological aspect does not ignore the noetic and therefore the verbal and aural aspects. In the *Theo-drama* the self-communication of the Absolute is both ontological and verbal (addressing the mind, explicatory).⁶⁶

Balthasar's teaching on grace is gathered together in Mary, who exemplifies the responsive receptivity (active in its passive receiving) that for Balthasar characterises creaturehood both as regards existence itself⁶⁷ and the fulfilment of that existence in the gift of grace.⁶⁸ Mary is given a key role in making this fulfilment possible, in her reception of Christ in the incarnation and in her representative response at the foot of

⁶³ Th II 315

⁶⁴ cf Th II 314-5 and 230; cf III 514, 518, 520; IV 420 (Being-in-grace is the same as being-in-love.)

⁶⁵ Th III 518

⁶⁶ Th II 399 cf chapter 6 section C1 above

⁶⁷ chapter 4 section B1 above

the cross.⁶⁹ She is the living example of the dynamics of this fulfilment, of the relationship between grace and freedom, providing a model for the active fruitfulness of finite surrender to divine grace, of the conception and birth that characterises the life of the Christian⁷⁰ and the role of the Church.⁷¹ In this light it becomes difficult to defend Noel Dermot O'Donoghue's conclusion that Balthasar's mariology betrays signs of "the kind of theology in which man is passively receptive and does not in any real sense work out his own salvation",⁷² although we could not concur with Ward's proposition of the opposite extreme that "the mediating role of the Spirit is taken over by Mary"⁷³—on the basis of what we have said about the Spirit and grace and the clear identification of Mary with creaturely receptivity and the Spirit with divine gift.

D Continuity and distinction in the nature-grace relationship

Finally we need to make the assessment central to our topic, that is, what does Balthasar's description of grace mean for the relation between that fundamental giving which constitutes our very existence as creatures and this 'special' giving in which the Giver himself is received? What place is there for a distinction between 'nature and grace'?

As we have seen, the theo-dramatic presentation of grace maintains the same basic assertion of the non-derivability of grace from 'nature' (now generally expressed as creatureliness or finitude) and of a distinction between creation on the one hand, and "the actual grace of God's supernatural self-disclosure" and the divine adoption⁷⁴ on the other (even though creation itself is unowed, is made for Christ, and the creature is always in some kind of relation to grace). We found de Lubac's Augustinian/Thomist

⁶⁸ chapter 5 note 48 and section D3 above

⁶⁹ chapter 6 section E4

⁷⁰ chapter 5 section D3

⁷¹ chapter 5 section F

⁷² Noel O'Donoghue: "A theology of Beauty" 3; cf F Kerr in the Foreword to Gardner, Moss, Quash, Ward: *Balthasar at the end of Modernity* 10

⁷³ Ward: "Kenosis: Death, Discourse and Resurrection" Ibid. 51

⁷⁴ KB 379 This grace is a second and higher work "that should not be explained in terms of the first level but from its own intrinsic character." KB 296

paradox expressed in terms of freedom as an inherent dramatic tension: finite freedom is self-transcendent movement but cannot force the disclosure of infinite freedom in which its fulfilment lies.⁷⁵ It strives for fulfilment in an absolute, but despite being ‘*causa sui*’ cannot achieve this by its own power or through possession of anything finite⁷⁶ but only in and through divine freedom⁷⁷— imaging the trinitarian ‘dialectic’ of expectation and surprise and the ‘going-out’ self-giving and indebted receiving amongst the persons of the Trinity in which the Father has ultimate priority as “the Origin”.⁷⁸

In chapter three we discussed the christocentric presentation of the same fundamental tension, where we found the Adam principle fundamentally oriented towards the Christ principle (indeed this movement exhibiting “a necessity inscribed in the constitution of man’s nature”⁷⁹), but there being no easy transition between the two, the former requiring ‘uprooting’ and ‘replanting’ according to the latter (and the transition requiring the ratification of created freedom). Alongside Balthasar’s determination to avoid the kind of continuity between the two that could be interpreted as either an ‘absorption’ of grace into nature or of nature into grace we were aware of a predilection for descriptions that distinctively favour an exceptionally intimate bond between the two (*circumincessio*) or an emphatically intrinsic orientation of one to the other (the relationship of seed to plant).

Gradually a tension between continuity and distinction emerged in our study—with the emphasis in the end resting upon the latter.⁸⁰ In chapter five we found that, strangely, the firm defence of a ‘dualism’ of grace is developed in apparent contradiction of Thérèse. In this dualistic conception of gift we found an unresolved tension between emphasis on *continuity* in divine giving (beginning with the imparting of freedom, itself gratuitous, and culminating with the gratuitous imparting of the Giver of that freedom in

⁷⁵ cf eg Th II 232, 237 This articulates grace’s gratuity.

⁷⁶ Th II 225-6; cf also 228, 242, 272, 313-314

⁷⁷ eg Th II 397 and 272, 250, 284, 292, 303

⁷⁸ Th V 104; cf chapter 3 section E above

⁷⁹ Th III 36

⁸⁰ Dalzell settles for a certain continuity within greater discontinuity. *Dramatic* 29-30, 50

the gift), and an emphasis on *distinction* between the two as two separate communications or gifts⁸¹ (with a similar tension in the corresponding human receiving).

The interest in the ‘view from eternity’ leans on the side of a far less markedly dualistic conception, for here there is just the one gift, that of the world given from Father to Son and then, in its state of fulfilment, from Son to Father in the Spirit.⁸² There is the one ‘big idea’: that the created world should find its end in God. There is simply one all-embracing plan: “God created the world (nature) to be united with him in Christ (supernatural order).”⁸³

However, the specifically intra-trinitarian perspective reveals the same tension. Both the gifts of creation and adoptive participation are united in having as their condition of possibility the *primal* divine self-bestowal of the eternal generation of the Son which, as it were, (in Balthasar’s more ‘Eckhartian’ moments) ‘contains’ both the self-giving of creation and of ‘re-creation’ in grace, such that Balthasar can talk about being “created and begotten together with the eternal Son” and even imply an *identification* of all three ‘events’; yet in their unfolding in the worldly sphere he refuses them the continuity of one process.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, Balthasar’s depiction of nature’s transcendence and its relationship to grace as an image of the Trinity conveys some sense of continuity between nature and grace, giving nature a very real self-transcendence towards its fulfilment and emphasising the circumincession between the two, but also clearly distinguishing the two in the radical dependence upon grace for fulfilment based somehow (as an image) in the difference between the Father and the Son in the Spirit. Moreover, there again appears to be a distinction between the dependence

⁸¹ Similarly is there just the one divine affirmation of the creature, the one ‘yes’, the one address as ‘thou’? (cf II 287; III 496; chapter 4 section B4) Does this address belong with the basic constitution of the subject or does it come later and thus to what extent does the ‘yes’ conferring the dignity of person belong universally to all subjects and to what extent is it ‘laid up’ awaiting our assimilation to it by grace?

⁸² cf chapter 2 section C above

⁸³ Th III 482; “the total gift already made” II 401

⁸⁴ Th II 311 The relationship between idea and reality articulates the same nature-grace tension. cf Th V 389-391, 458

of our nature as regards origin and as regards fulfilment. There are *two* indebtednesses: for the gift of transcendence⁸⁵ and for the gift of the fulfilment of that transcendence.⁸⁶

The depiction of grace in terms of the mutual indwelling of freedoms that has so dominated our discussion of a theo-dramatic presentation of the nature-grace relationship brings us to the nub of the problem of continuity and distinction in the creation-grace relationship. How can an (emphatic) distinction be maintained when, in a theology keenly aware of the participation of all things in being⁸⁷ and the location of all creation in God,⁸⁸ grace itself is understood in terms of participation and indwelling? How exactly are we to distinguish participation in being and the participation that belongs to grace? In particular, how is human participation in being, which (as a spiritual as well as material participation) always has some relation to grace, to be distinguished from the actual gift of *theosis*? If, for example the fundamental participation in being by which we exist is to be described as “participation in the real being of God”⁸⁹ where does that leave the promise of grace understood as “participation in the divine nature”?⁹⁰ The theo-dramatic focus on freedom highlights this difficulty, drawing attention to both the *essential* relationship of finite freedom to infinite freedom, as well as to the (non-necessary) graced relationship, in such a way that whilst grace as such is described in terms of the reciprocal indwelling of infinite freedom in finite freedom⁹¹ it is in fact clear from Balthasar’s description that finite freedom is *always* within infinite freedom, which is immanent to it whilst being infinitely transcendent to it.⁹²

Whilst Balthasar is aware of the impression of continuity conveyed in his analysis of freedom and its fulfilment,⁹³ he clearly wishes to maintain a definite ‘dividing line’ in

⁸⁵ Th V 103

⁸⁶ Ibid. 104

⁸⁷ cf chapter 1 section D above and chapter 4 section B2

⁸⁸ cf chapter 2 section C above

⁸⁹ GL IV 404

⁹⁰ cf eg Th II 398-399, 311; cf IV 373

⁹¹ cf page 242 above

⁹² eg Th II 241f; IV 373; cf chapter 5 section B above

⁹³ eg Th IV 371

the unfolding of finite freedom's vocation to perfect participation in the infinite. At the heart of this decision to lean heavily in the direction of distinction within a perspective that has a sensibility for continuity is his sense for *a qualitative distinctiveness of divine initiative*, a unique identity belonging to the divine self-bestowal in grace that is qualitatively distinct from the divine act of creation, however much the two events are understood to coincide in time. Hence the pattern of two 'kinds' or features of divine action that has emerged: God endows his creature with freedom and God freely communicates himself to that creature. This is the *dualism of grace*. Both endowments are the free gift of God, but the second cannot be derived from the first. It is an additional gift (and in this strict sense 'accidental'/modal⁹⁴) of which the first is the precondition, and has its own uniquely superlative quality, or 'higher' content—even though the former gift of freedom involves some kind of self-imparting on the part of God as well as the latter. The central point is the non-negotiable *non-divinity* of the (logically) prior, receptive gift (that is, finite, free being) as distinct from the gift of divine grace, which is *divine*, a personal sharing in what is God's: divine, infinite and eternal. However, to maintain this, is it really necessary to insist on seeing the establishment of nature in existence and the bestowal of grace as '*two separate elements*' ("*...müssen beide Momente klar unterschieden werden...*")?⁹⁵ And how can this kind of dualistic emphasis finally cohere with Balthasar's strong awareness of God's *one* plan from the beginning to give himself to the creature he established in his image and likeness?⁹⁶

Balthasar's dualism of gift does offer an answer to the problem of distinguishing between the participation in being that belongs to the existence of an entity and that participation that defines the meaning of grace. It is the difference between being filled

⁹⁴By nature we are forever in receipt of our existence whether we like it or not but we are only in a state of grace by God giving and us accepting the gift of himself in the gift of finite freedom and us choosing to accept that our goal (as well as origin) lies here.

⁹⁵ Th IV 375 (TD III 349) my italics; cf the reference to 'two moments' in his description of de Lubac's *Le Mystère du surnaturel*. HDL 72

with being (to a degree in accordance with the nature of the entity) on the one hand, and being given access to the inner life of absolute being on the other.⁹⁷ However for the spiritual creatures for whom the latter is possible and for whom, according to Balthasar, this form of participation is their only end, can we really say that the relationship between the two is *not* one process—that our inviolable participation in being, as creatures made uniquely in his image and likeness and ordained to an end in him, and the personal participation in the inner life of God which fulfils this nature and end are *not* established in a relationship of organic continuity (however qualitatively distinct the two may be)? If not, have we really banished an extrinsic understanding of the relationship between nature and grace? If the one was always made for the other in the mind of God then surely they go together and should not be separated in our perspective either.

Balthasar is obviously engaged in a fine balancing act and this can make definitive interpretation difficult and frustrating. However it would not be untypical of his thought that he should be perfectly happy with such a tension. Indeed his cautious attitude to the topic⁹⁸ may demand a delicate balancing act. Nevertheless it is possible to suggest that here we are trying to reconcile the ultimately incompatible: a *ressourcement* retrieval of (patristic) recognition of the unity of nature and grace and a (basically neo-scholastic) distinction of nature and grace powerfully interpreted through a dialectic heavily influenced by nineteenth century German philosophical preoccupations. It is almost as though the coincidence of the two approaches prevents the coherent flowering of one or the other. Is it possible that without the latter preoccupation with dialectic, Balthasar might have been able to opt more simply for a more unitive understanding of the creation-grace relationship? Perhaps what he calls

⁹⁶ eg Th III 47, 482; “the total gift” II 401, 277; Therese’s ‘everything is grace’ cf chapter 1 page 45 above; chapter 2 section C; chapter 5 pages 124-125. Regarding the possible conflict between his christocentrism and an emphatic double gratuity cf chapter 5 pages 134 and 167.

⁹⁷ II 398, IV 373

⁹⁸ cf Introduction section B above

the paradox of our nature (that our end transcends our natural powers) might not have been emphasised quite so much as a *paradox*, but have simply been seen as a distinctive feature of our nature, and the fact that the end to which we are oriented so transcends our natural capacities and is so dependent on grace for its attainment would not have meant we cannot describe our movement by grace towards that end as an organic process.

Taking more interest in the *imago dei* as *spirit* (rather than always systematically translating it into a specifically *imago trinitatis*), and not seeing our matter-spirit constitution as just one fundamental human characteristic among three others, might also have facilitated a final settling for a more unitive treatment. For, as creatures who are *spiritual* as well as material, our end can only be in God who is Spirit.⁹⁹ The very fact that we are thus created in his image (are spiritual) immediately indicates our end is in him (who is Spirit) and that by nature the participation in being that gives us existence is at once ordered to a spiritual participation in the self-disclosure of the inner life of absolute being in whose image we are made. Our very nature thus so spells out our end and meaning that it would seem strange and highly contrived to divide up these aspects of spiritual-corporeal participation into *separate gifts*. In this case differentiation in participation is less to do with the difference between our establishment in existence and our establishment in grace and more to do with the difference between the participation of spiritual creatures in being and that of the non-spiritual creation, that is the difference in creation between those beings who can (spiritual) and cannot (purely material) experience this kind of personal participation in the divine bestowal of being.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ This is specifically in Christ, God the Son incarnate, (*the* image of the invisible God) who shares our spirit-body nature. For what follows I am much indebted to Edward Holloway: *Perspectives in Philosophy* I (Faith-Keyway 1994) especially 74-91.

¹⁰⁰ After all as Balthasar himself is of course aware, the heightened apex of the gift of being, the second act or communication of being, ie access to the self-disclosure of absolute being, is a possibility for *spiritual* beings. (cf eg Th II 400 "The realised entities are filled with as much being as they can contain, but in being thus filled, insofar as they are spiritual, they also have access in principle to a self-disclosure on the part of absolute Being.")

It is not so much the case then that the human creature straddles two different orders, natural and supernatural,¹⁰¹ but that his fundamental existence and his vocation and perfection lie in the one supernatural order of the love of God which both creates a unique contingent being in the very divine image and likeness and (entirely in keeping with such a nature) brings it to fulfilment through the (christo-pneumatological) perfection of this unique relation to the divine. Of course the perfection of this creature is not the *same* as its creation, and there is change—growth or deterioration—and thus differentiation in the same sense as there is between a seedling and a fully grown shrub (or a seedling and a withered plant), but it is certainly not a *separate, additional* gift, rather its authentic flowering.¹⁰² As spiritual-material creatures made in the image of God our relationship to the supernatural is natural (hence the sense in which our situation can authentically be called paradoxical—without placing unnecessary emphasis on contradiction). Indeed this relationship can be described as unequivocally *substantial*—without in any sense implying that there is a ‘just demand’ for grace, but simply because God made us, uniquely, in his image and his likeness therefore at once ordaining us to an end in him in whose image we are made. To maintain that anything else could satisfy such a creature is absurd (as Balthasar recognised), but to fail to acknowledge this as one gratuitous gift suggests a blindness to the real implications of there being just one end for us, an end appropriate to the corporeal-spiritual nature God created—however undoubtedly exalted and privileged an end that be—and therefore an end in a relation of continuity with our nature.

We do not need to carve this relationship/process up into different acts of giving in order to maintain the distinction between natural and supernatural. Indeed this latter distinction is a far more fundamental one than can be upheld by dividing our nature and end, for it lies in the real distinction between God and creature and in the non-necessity of the creature in its nature to God (which is therefore unable to determine him) and the

¹⁰¹cf chapter 1 section B above

¹⁰²Hence a division between nature and accidental is inappropriate in this respect.

non-necessity of God to the creature's being in his nature as such, (in the sense that he is not an element of our created substance), and can be rejected even though he is the 'perfecting principle' of our nature.

It is in this sense alone that grace can be considered 'modal' or 'accidental' (as Balthasar described it in *Karl Barth*). For whilst the orientation to the supernatural, the relationship to grace, is substantial and we cannot define our nature without reference to this vertical relationship, *grace* is not substantial, the supernatural is not the natural, because God is never part of our nature and because grace, being in communion with God, can be lost. We can uphold both this and the continuity of relationship between our nature and the supernatural; our nature is in a relationship to the supernatural as an imperfect thing is to its perfection, even though that perfection can be rejected.

The confusion over the bond and the distinction between nature and grace that we have identified in Balthasar's various descriptions and in his lingering over the idea of two divine communications suggests that he never quite leaves the neo-scholastic perspective behind. Nor after the mid-century condemnation of de Lubac is this surprising. However, looking over his shoulder to the old school of thought (however unconsciously) is unlikely to facilitate a creative retrieval of the patristic perspective re-emerging at the time of the *nouvelle theologie*. It is as though he is not entirely able to break out of the former world view and when it comes to specifics we are left with the 'two orders', loitering in the territory of double gratuity.

It could of course be argued that this is necessary in order to maintain continuity with theological tradition and in particular to take on board Church teaching against Baius and Jansen and that of *Humani Generis*. But is adherence to the neo-scholastic way of looking at the question necessary to do this—especially if it itself breaks with earlier theological tradition, as the de Lubac thesis he first took up suggests? Indeed perhaps a true retrieval of Patristic thought is only possible if the old system is straightforwardly rejected. Such a rejection could not of course be understood as synonymous with an adherence to Bainism—as though there were just the two

alternatives. To maintain that there is just the one end for man and that there is for him just the one gift—that is, to maintain that for us as spiritual-material creatures made in the image of God, participation in being (non-accidental) and participation in grace (which can be lost) is one process—does not amount to Baius’s position, not because grace is still seen as a secondary gratuitous gift (as in the end it seems it is for Balthasar), but because this one end, and indeed the *entire* plan of God from the beginning for this creation, is *entirely* (entire-ly) gratuitous, the work of divine love. Balthasar, as we have seen, fails to indicate clearly and with full conviction that recognition of the one divinely ordained end means one divinely ordained gift, one unified work of divine love—and this without any danger of grace therefore being seen as derivative of nature and a Pelagian or Baian position adopted. For there are no ‘just claims’ on God, either supernatural or natural. Neither our creation or our fulfilment are ‘necessary’ to God, rather both are the free work of God’s love who, in the *same* order of free love, brings to the appropriate perfection those beings he has created. If we are willed to be through love then our natural ordination to the supernatural can only be through love, but through the *same* love that willed us to be, the love which seeks to bring to natural perfection all that it has made.

Finally, in as much as Balthasar does take up the new approach and make a radical break from the neo-scholastic perspective this does not amount to a ‘supernaturalising’ of nature.¹⁰³ In this approach it is not that grace is so emphasised that there is no room for nature (as might be said of the tendency towards Barthian constriction) or that because nature is always related to grace there is nothing truly natural anymore. The issue is *what we mean by nature* and whether Christian theology can ever seriously think of nature as a sphere in isolation from or independent of grace, or whether it needs honestly to confront and think through the fact that our peculiar nature does not fit the Aristotelian pattern where every created nature has its own natural end. As a uniquely

¹⁰³ cf note 32 above; also Roland Chia: “Theological Aesthetics or Aesthetic Theology Some Reflections on the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 1996 93-95

material-spiritual nature made in the image of God for intimate sharing in his own divine life, it is uniquely defined beyond and above itself, and so is always in some kind of relation to the supernatural—without compromising its ‘naturalness’.

Chapter 9

The nature-grace relationship and the doctrine of the Trinity: some questions for von Balthasar's theology

In our discussion of the nature-grace relationship in the *Theo-drama* we have been increasingly aware of the significance of the intra-trinitarian drama for the drama between God and man in which human freedom realises (or loses) itself in participation in the triune freedom of God. In this final part of our Conclusion we reflect on some important implications of this relationship as viewed by Balthasar, firstly as regards the significance of human freedom and secondly as regards the significance of paradox and tension and its relationship to God.

A Human freedom and the Trinity

Our conclusions regarding nature in the previous chapter drew attention to the emphasis on human freedom in the *Theo-drama*. However we have also been aware that it is difficult at times to see how this coheres with some of the more 'extreme' aspects of the intra-trinitarian perspective in which the drama set in motion by human freedom does seem insignificant or 'swallowed up' in the intra-trinitarian 'action'.¹ As we saw in

¹This is related to concerns about the significance of human history and socio-political action in Balthasar's understanding of 'our play within the play of the Trinity'. cf the critique of Steffen Lösel: "Unapocalyptic Theology: History and Eschatology in Balthasar's *Theo-drama*" *Modern Theology* 17 (2001) 201-225; the moderate critique of Gerry O'Hanlon: "May Christians Hope for a Better World?" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 54 (1988) 175-189; "Theological Dramatics" in Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris, eds.: *The Beauty of Christ Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1994) 101-111; also Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt: "Theo-drama and Political Theology" *Communio* 25 (1998) 532-552. For Thomas G Dalzell (who offers a more positive understanding of Balthasar's view of history) it is the focus on the inter-personal rather than the social, on the freedom of the individual, and on the analogy of proportionality (resulting from a concentration on the activity of Christ rather than the Spirit) which restricts engagement with social theology. *Dramatic* 19, 58, 227f, 246-285, 291f (The trinitarian conception actually allows for a genuine 'giving' from the

chapters two and five, the relation between the eternal begetting of the Son, and our creation and adoption is so closely tied that at times it inevitably appears constrictive (for example Balthasar is able to say that it is as if adoption is given *automatically* with the surrendering of the Son²). The possibility of the creature proffering a definitive and final no to being begotten in grace seems particularly remote. It is difficult to see how Balthasar's understanding of the predestination of the Son can avoid being seen as deterministic; indeed being the goal and ground of the world drama, Balthasar tells us, is coextensive with determining (*bestimmen*) its entire course.³ This problem is only exacerbated by the location, not only of the God-man relation, but also of sin and the cross within the trinitarian relations, such that sin can be described as a mere knot in the love of Father and Son⁴, there being no distance greater than the trinitarian separation of God from himself most fully revealed in the forsakeness of the cross.⁵

As well as being much concerned with the reality of finite freedom, Balthasar's is a theology very much preoccupied with seeing things as they are 'laid up'⁶ in God, from the divine perspective which beholds things as they are meant to be.⁷ Looked at from this point of view everything does appear to be decided in advance and the decisions and actions of finite freedom seem completely overtaken by those of infinite freedom, that is

world to God. cf 204-211; also "The Enrichment of God in Balthasar's Trinitarian Eschatology" *Irish Theological Quarterly* 66 2001 3-18)

² Th III 254

³ Th II 268 (TD II/I 246)

⁴ Th IV 330; cf chapter 6 section C3 above

⁵ cf chapter 6 section D2 and chapter 7 section B above; cf Th IV 325, 323; III 531. "The Son is eternally begotten by the Father: within the infinite divine nature, in other words, one Person is "let be" in absolute Otherness; what deep abysses are here! God has *always* plumbed them, but once a finite world of creatures has been opened up, these depths must be traversed stepwise as forms of alienation. Nonetheless these steps can only be taken as part of a journey already (and always) accomplished in the infinite Trinity. And when the particular mystery of the Son's incarnation takes place, he traverses—as man and together with all sufferers and on their behalf—the realms of forsakeness that, as God, he has already (and has always) traversed." (Th V 502) Similarly the "idea" of creation (including the cross) made realisable by the divine begetting "has already been overtaken and surpassed by the divine life and as such is incorporated into the absolute gratuitousness of trinitarian freedom and vitality." (509) This "has always been realised" aspect is central to Balthasar's perspective. (508)

⁶ On use of this expression (derived from Adrienne von Speyr, as pointed out by Nichols: *No Bloodless Myth* 215) cf Th V 257ff, 302, 328.

⁷ cf Th V 389; cf passage from John of Ruysbroeck 390-391 Regarding Balthasar's use of a trinitarian and christological eschatology looking at things from God's perspective cf 506. Interestingly it is Eckhart who he describes as speaking "from the perspective of eternity". (444)

the interaction of Father, Son and Spirit. Often though, it is the *tension* between these two concerns (that is, the seriousness with which human freedom, its actions and its becoming should be treated and the preoccupation with the creation and consummation of the world as beheld and possessed by God) that seems to fascinate Balthasar. The defence of finite freedom in the face of christological constriction described at the end of chapter three did not resolve this tension but dwelt on the paradox of maintaining at one and the same time that the Son is the guarantor of the success of God's plan for the world but that there is no sure anticipation of 'happy ending'. In the descriptions of our birth from God in the begetting of the Son and our assimilation to our idea in Him, we found the mysterious coincidence and distinction between creation and adoption, between our idea (as we are in God's eyes) and the free *process* in which, through our co-operation with God's grace, we come to be conformed to that idea ("the gap between idea and reality"⁸). Then, in our brief discussion of universal salvation at the end of chapter seven, we found a similar preoccupation with the tension between the reality of human free action and thus the possibility of tragedy in the world plan on the one hand, and the all embracing love of the absolute will of the triune God on the other, such that the end seemed an open question. The tension is part of the entrancing problem of how we are "to conceive finite being—time-space being—located in the embrace of the absolute", avoiding both pantheistic absorption and a mere juxtaposition of the two.⁹ Again it comes under an *imago trinitatis* in which everything 'shot through' with potentiality is found positively in God.¹⁰ The 'finite side' of the tension is thus taken seriously as the divinely created image of God—but it is only an image, and an image of an ever-greater God to whom it is ordered.

However, even allowing for Balthasar's preference for tension,¹¹ and taking into account the asymmetry of grace, it remains the case that it is not always possible to square the

⁸ Th V 387

⁹ Ibid. 385

¹⁰ Ibid. 389

¹¹ cf section B below

paradoxical openness for finite freedom to act this way or that within the ever-greater infinitude of the divine freedom with some of Balthasar's more extreme assertions about the place of the drama of the world within the drama that he traces in the inner life of God. If the God-world distance is so located within the distance between the divine hypostases that there is no distance 'bigger' than this primal separation, a definite rejection of God is of limited significance, for it is always overtaken by the Father-Son distance/relationship within which it is contained. Finite freedom can choose itself as its absolute good as much as it likes, but this is of little ultimate impact, for it cannot 'escape' its location in this triune relationship nor the determination of the absolute sovereign will of God to reconcile the world to himself.¹² Balthasar's emphatic exposition of the genuine ability of finite freedom to choose for or against intimacy with God as its good and its goal needs to face up honestly to the fact that according to his trinitarian perspective it is *impossible* to go further away from God than he is already from himself in his inter-hypostatic 'distance'. In as much as Balthasar upholds the latter position we are dealing here with the incompatible, not merely the paradoxical.

B Paradox

1 The centrality of tension

Balthasar's preference for duality in the nature-grace relationship has raised the question of the influence of dialectic/paradox in Balthasar's work. This first cropped up in chapter one where we found that the unique 'double-sided' situation of man in relation to natural and supernatural is described specifically as *paradox* or *dialectic*. The question arose again in the analysis of the anthropological section of *Theo-drama* II in chapter six. Here we saw that whatever allowances are made for the setting of his threefold anthropological tensions in a natural pre-Christian framework, their influence remains problematic whether it be because this 'description' is still considered to contain the fundamental features of man, and/or because it introduces contradiction and

¹² cf Th V 303-304; chapter 7 section B above

non-coherence into nature, or because tension (now ‘hypertension’) remains central to the Christian resolution itself. We were particularly concerned about the first tension of matter and spirit rendering man not a *unity* of matter and spirit but rather a tension between the two orders, only resolved in Christ in the extreme and uttermost stretching apart of the Son from the Father on the Cross—a problematic tension itself to which we will return to below.

We have seen the centrality of tension to theo-drama.¹³ More fundamentally, for Balthasar tension lies at the heart of being in the ‘real distinction’ between essence and existence. These two poles—and those involved in the other bi-polar tensions: individual and universal, obedience and freedom, self realization of finite freedom through handing over to infinite freedom—can only be understood by means of one another in strict analysis.¹⁴ For Balthasar the fact that there are such polarities “gives finite Being its consistency, its vitality, and its dignity which lifts it above the level of what is merely factual and makes it the object of an insatiable interest, indeed of a reverent, amazed admiration” in the ongoing paradox of ever greater disclosure within ever greater mystery and concealment.¹⁵ Whilst this insight clearly sets forth the uncontainable and inexhaustible wonder of being, the emphasis on tension and oscillation tends to mean that this openness and determination to avoid tidy, closed systems is vulnerable to becoming a kind of ‘systematic uncertainty’, in which the mysterious profundity of contingent being is such that, in Balthasar’s own words, it “*makes it impossible to arrive at a definitive solution to a problem.*”¹⁶

¹³ Th I 125-6; chapter 3 section A2 and B1 above; chapter 5 page 159; cf the reciprocal escalation of love and hate chapter 6 section C3.

¹⁴ Balthasar: “Theo-logic: On the Work as a Whole” *Communio* Winter 1993 625

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. (my italics)

2 The influence of Przywara

The pervasive significance of tension, paradox and polarity in Balthasar's work owes much to the early and enduring influence of Erich Przywara.¹⁷ The Polish philosopher's characteristic use of polarity and contradiction (*Widerspruch*), tension (*Spannung*) and oscillation (*Schwingung*) 'zwischen' opposing poles is related to his methodological commitment to the concrete situation in the world, the 'sachlichkeit',¹⁸ and also to his appreciation for "das Konkrete",¹⁹ which involves giving due attention to the puzzling divisions and tensions experienced in the world.²⁰ The latter also demands attentive listening to actual contemporaneous reflection on the reality of being in the world, where Przywara encountered a preoccupation with polarity and dialectic in different cultural and philosophical schools of thought (such as the polarity of the romantics, the dialectic of Kant, of Hegel, of Nietzsche, of Kierkegaard and then that of the Protestant 'dialectical' theologians of the early twentieth century, all already familiar to Balthasar from his doctoral dissertation on eschatological problems in modern German Literature).²¹ Bringing the Catholic theological tradition and philosophia

¹⁷ cf chapter 1 section D above. The few works providing a thorough treatment in English are: J Zeitz SJ: *Spirituality and Analogia Entis according to Erich Przywara SJ* (Z) (University Press of America 1982); A C Bouquet: "A German Catholic Philosophy of Religion" in *Theology* Vol 29 1934 327-38; Neils C Nielsen, Jr: "Przywara's Philosophy of the Analogia Entis" in *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol 5, No 4, June 1952 599-620; Walter Marshall Horton: *Contemporary Continental Theology: An Interpretation for Anglo-Saxons* (SCM London, 1938) 65-84, 105, 178. cf also Medard Kehl's Introduction in *The von Balthasar Reader* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1982) 17-21. For Balthasar's own summary see his "Erich Przywara" in H J Schultz: *Tendenzen der Theologie im 20 Jahrhundert: Eine Geschichte Portrats* (EP) 354-359 (Kreuz-Verlag/Walter-Verlag, Stuttgart 1966).

¹⁸This is objectivity or factuality—rather than speculation— 'allowing the facts to speak' historically, and existentially.

¹⁹This refers to the fact of being in the world, seen, for example, in his anthropological perspective and his preoccupation with a *creaturely* metaphysics. Z 23-26: "Our metaphysics is, according to its formal object 'creaturely' for it deals with the web of tensions between consciousness and being." Przywara: *Analogia Entis* 19, cited by Z 126.

²⁰eg the 'tensions' of body/spirit; man/woman; being/consciousness; ontic/noetic; a priori/a posteriori; philosophy/theology.

²¹ *Geschichte des Eschatologischen Problems in der Modernen Deutschen Literatur* (Dissertation, Zurich, 1930) completed before his encounter with Przywara. cf P Henrici SJ: "The Philosophy of Hans Urs von Balthasar" in D L Schindler, ed.: *Hans Urs von Balthasar. His Life and his Work* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1991) 149. This included an outline of the development of philosophy from the middle ages to the modern era and a detailed comparative treatment of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, and was finally reworked into the three-volume *Apokalypse der Deutschen Seele. Studien zu einer Lehre von letzten Haltungen*, with chapters on a variety of idealist thinkers as well as on Kierkegaard, Scheler, Heidegger

perennis to his engagement with modern thinkers, Przywara's extensive analysis of the history of thought investigates a whole range of contrasting positions²² rejecting the exclusive pursuit of one particular pole, rather encouraging emphasis on the *mutuality* of the poles—but *without suggesting an annihilation of the difference* between them. Hence the abiding focus on difference, an understanding of unity which embraces an oscillation between different poles and proposes a central principle of *difference-unity, of unity in tension*.

Having initially conveyed this central rhythm of unity in tension by a notion of *polarity*,²³ his endeavours culminated in the establishment of the analogy of being as “*die abschließende Formel*”²⁴ and the immanent synthesis of Christianity.²⁵ In a ‘multi-leveled’ analogical interrelation of opposites the horizontal, intra-mundane metaphysical ‘tensions’ open up to the ‘supra-worldly’ God-creature analogy, coming ‘in’ from ‘above’²⁶. Here a thinking is revealed which is neither purely ontic nor noetic in starting point, neither strictly a priori nor a posteriori, neither simply philosophical nor theological,²⁷ but a synthesis between opposing approaches, which is an eternal open-ended movement (*ewige, offenlassende Bewegung*).²⁸ Being is not accessible just as pure logic²⁹, nor on the other hand as pure contradiction which annihilates logic,³⁰ rather

and Barth. Of course Balthasar's direct engagement with the latter theologian a few years later consolidated the influence of his dialectical approach on Balthasar's thought.

²²eg from the mild juxtaposition of Augustine and Thomas to the radical opposition of rationalist and fideist; pantheist and theopanist. eg in *Religionsphilosophie Katholischer Theologie* (1926) cf Bouquet's summary in “German” 327-348; also Marshall Horton: “Contemporary” 69-70, 73-83

²³ Originating in romantic writers this was developed by Przywara (through contact with other thinkers such as Guardini and Newman) (Z 127f) to describe the Augustinian ‘God in and above us’, a living unity in tension of divine transcendence and immanence which he established as the “*Polaritätsgrund*”. EP 355; Z 14-15.

²⁴ EP 356

²⁵ cf eg Z 119-120

²⁶ cf Medard Kehl's Introduction in *The von Balthasar Reader* 20; Z 129, 138-155, especially diagram on 151 and then the final ‘levels’ of analogy 154-5.

²⁷ Z 135; 139-149

²⁸ EP 356

²⁹This would be the metaphysics of pure identity and the pure stability of Parmenides. It only expresses the principle of non-contradiction as *identity* (what is, is), making the principle of non-contradiction a thing rather than the basic (minimum) ground of thought. Z 153; EP 356

³⁰This is the flux of Heraclitus. It dissolves the basic ground (the ‘minimum’ mentioned in preceding footnote) necessary to the principle of non-contradiction. Z 153; EP 356

analogy is the “relationship between identity and contradiction”,³¹ the most fundamental of the forms of thinking.³² It is the “middle in motion” that Aristotle found between the autonomous opposing poles of Heraclitus and Parmenides, which consists in the oscillating rhythms between a dynamism beyond (transcending immanence) and a receiving from above (immanent transcendence).³³ In and above this metaphysical creaturely analogy comes (from above) the analogy between God and creature, and the decisive analogy between the intra-creaturely oscillation and this movement between creature and Creator is neither pantheism, nor theopanism, but the Augustinian dynamic *movement towards* God (“..our hearts are restless until they rest in you”) and the attitude of *receptivity* in the face of the unattainable.³⁴ Crucially he does not want to ‘overview’ (“*überblicken*”) the analogy of being, but to recognise ‘the ever-greater God’ who, out of every failing attempt of finite thinking on the absolute, shines out all the more intangibly. *Im Grundbegriff* analogia entis means that it is in the essence of the creaturely ‘is’—which is in a state of becoming—to be an ‘is not’ aswell, standing as ‘nothing’ in the face of the ‘Creator out of Nothing’.³⁵ It is the crucifixion of the Logos that is the key to the analogy of being (as we mentioned in Chapter two³⁶), all ‘literal’ concepts being broken and driven into pairs in submission to Christ and, through the “flashing contradiction of his cross and resurrection, point to the unfathomable depths of God.”³⁷

³¹ Z 153

³² Ibid. 152-3; 158

³³ Z 154 (*Analogia Entis* 114, 121); EP 356 “Only analogy is capable of respecting both extremes (logic and dialectics). Logic deals with the immediacy of physical laws. Dialectics is a continual shifting between opposites. But analogy alone maintains a measure ‘equilibrium’...” *Analogia Entis* 112 cited by Z 154.

³⁴ EP 356

³⁵ “Im Grundbegriff: das inner geschöpfliche ‘ist (gilt)’ ist sosehr innerlich (im Wesen des ‘Werdens’) ein ‘ist im nicht’ ..., daß es zwischen-gott-geschöpflich sich als ‘Nichts’ zum ‘Schöpfer aus dem Nichts’ verhält.” cited in EP 357 This reminds us of Balthasar’s description of our finitude as stretching from nothingness to infinity. (cf chapter 4 section C1 above; Th II 400f) However it is also not unreminiscent of Eckhart’s understanding that the creature is nothing, which Balthasar rejects. For the German mystic being is borrowed, not received as its own, and this means there is not a genuine analogy of being. cf Th V 436f; 441

³⁶ section B1

³⁷ EP 357

Przywara's apparent preference for analogy over dialectic and his relation of dialectic to analogy is clearly very important for assessing Balthasar's proneness to using the language of polar tension. It tends to confirm the possibility that for him tension and dialectic are always tension *in relation*, a way of describing the mystery of unity which does not override authentic distinction that runs throughout Catholic understanding of the God-world relation and (if Przywara is correct in his analysis) can be found throughout the history of thought. His use of paradox and polarity is intrinsically related to his use of the analogy of being.

However, the question is whether Przywara's subordination of dialectic to analogy *is* always clear and decisive. In as much as Przywara's and Balthasar's use of 'tension terminology' does articulate the basic synthesis of difference in unity that belongs to philosophical and Christian reality, it finds a home in the Catholic tradition, even though the particular distinctiveness of the synthesis would remain open to discussion.³⁸ Indeed, it could be recognised to draw attention to the richness of being (which—amidst our *unified* experience of it—confronts us with irreducibly *polar* characteristics resistant to simple reduction into one-sided formulas (for example, flux/static; a priori/a posteriori). It could also be understood to offer a clear and profound articulation of the relationship of finite being to God's infinite being (God as 'Wholly Other' who is 'Non-Other'³⁹) and an articulation of the characteristics peculiar to the '*new* being' of the Christian life in particular (for example the coincidence of freedom-obedience, awe-intimacy, poverty-wealth), as well as the unique characteristics of the relationship between human nature and its end in grace.⁴⁰ Such use of paradox remains significant because the Christian *synthesis* cannot be authentically conveyed if the *difference* between the 'opposites' in each 'daring integration'⁴¹ is eliminated (hence the significance of the nuptial image of *communio*⁴²). Such a systematisation⁴³ would risk

³⁸ cf chapter 1 note 56

³⁹ eg Th II 193; cf chapter 2 note 96

⁴⁰ The fulfilment for which it is made transcends its nature.

⁴¹ Th II 127

⁴² cf chapter 5 note 83

neglecting the revelation of the mystery of the love and power of God, “*who is able to unite things which man regards as incapable of union*”.⁴³ The continuing use of paradox is a ceaseless reminder that what is brought together in the Christian synthesis transcends ordinary human conception/speculation of what it is possible to unite (whilst simultaneously satisfying the deepest human yearnings). It is therefore also a witness to the distinctive power of grace, to the ‘ever greater’ character of revelation.

Nevertheless the *emphasis on difference* is noticeable and open to question. A unity which does not annihilate difference, a *mutuality*—which must presuppose enduring difference in order for their to be relation at all—is not problematic. However the constant reference to *tension, oscillation, paradox, opposition* can appear to weigh rather considerably in favour of contradiction and flux, or at least suggest an *over-preoccupation* with the opposition of the poles. Whilst it is clear in most cases that tension is being used in its literal sense of something stretched, pulled in two opposing directions, the emphasis on opposition and the cocktail of terminology designating some kind of polarity makes it difficult to eschew the shadow of other meanings (tension meaning strain or hostility—particularly in view of our main theo-dramatic context where dramatic tension does involve conflict and confrontation; oscillation suggesting instability, uncertainty, fluctuation and vacillation as well as simply swinging from one side to another; paradox meaning something that *is* self-contradictory as well as something seemingly contradictory). Although this ambiguity is not entirely absent from the German (where the same variety of word meanings apply), some of the particular terminological meanings have a precision which makes it easier to locate the intended meaning securely. Interestingly *Schwingung* (normally translated as oscillation) can also refer to an ‘arched course’ such as the *extension* (*Schwingung...sich ziehen*) of a bridge across a river, connecting with and illuminating Balthasar’s usage of

⁴³ Balthasar refers to the tendency of human speculation “to bring contraries together under one heading” in a synthesis that does not attribute any lasting significance to the opposites of thesis and antithesis. Th II 127

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Spannung in the christocentric anthropology discussed in chapter six above. More significantly, *Widerspruch* has a philosophical usage that specifically refers to the contrast between two phenomena or processes that simultaneously necessitate and exclude each other, for example, form and content, essence and phenomenon, capital and work. Whilst this certainly exemplifies the need for the English-speaking reader to ‘get under the skin’ of a distinctly German heritage and world-view, an association of Przywara’s usage with this particular philosophical application hardly relieves the anxiety that rather much is being made of the necessity of opposition, seeing as this Germanic usage is readily associated with philosophical positions in which a necessary conflict does lie at the heart of things.

3 Beyond Przywara?

As we have already mentioned, Balthasar himself was in fact concerned about what he understood to be an unbalanced emphasis on difference in Przywara’s understanding of analogy, seeking to correct this in his own work. As well as drawing attention to the different readings of Lateran IV,⁴⁵ Balthasar also uncovers a tendency towards the Heraclitean pole on Przywara’s part in the works following *Analogia Entis* (which Balthasar calls a watershed). There is an attachment to the radicality of creaturely difference and the aspect of nothingness. Balthasar rejects this, as we saw in his own development of a christological analogy of being, focusing his accolades on the thought of *Analogia Entis* as “*das Pharmakon für die Philosophie und Theologie unserer Zeit*”.⁴⁶ These extremes on Przywara’s part temper Balthasar’s overall assessment of his Polish mentor, such that his awareness of the abiding significance of Przywara—that he is an incomparable teacher whose insights every thinking person should think through, but then they have to go on alone⁴⁷—are rather reminiscent of Barth’s comments on the

⁴⁵ cf chapter 2 note 65

⁴⁶ EP 357 Balthasar’s italics

⁴⁷ Ibid. 359

influence that the great protestant dialectician, Kierkegaard, had on him.⁴⁸ However it remains to be seen whether the later emphasis on the *Widerspruchsrhythmus* is really so very divergent from the main position that Balthasar draws from Przywara. Surely the obsession with nothingness was already ‘simmering’ in the thrilling radicality of the creaturely ‘Nothing’ in the “als ‘Nichts’ zum ‘Schöpfer aus dem Nichts’” that we cited above and which Przywara, quoted by Balthasar himself, says expresses the very “*Grundbegriff*” of *analogia entis*? And the *oscillation* inherent in his conception of analogy, that toing and froing between transcending immanence and immanent transcendence⁴⁹ was always rather close to the “either-or of continual shifting between opposites” which he says defines dialectics,⁵⁰ and closer to the Heraclitean perpetual movement than to the Parmenidian rest.

Perhaps such dialectical terminology and method of discussion is simply less familiar to the Anglo-Saxon audience—although this may no longer be quite so much the case if H Slaatte was right in claiming (in 1968) that paradox has become used more widely and taken more seriously than ever before in the history of thought.⁵¹ However a greater awareness of the background to this terminology only tends to support suggestions that dialectic has an intrinsic, weighted significance in Przywara’s synthesis. Certainly, Marshall Horton (writing in the 1930s) was not slow to make the connection with the dialectical method of modern German philosophy, understanding Przywara’s originality in his adaptation of the ancient topic of analogy and essence and existence to this new approach.⁵² Bouquet writes of “the strong Hegelian background” to Przywara’s *Religionsphilosophie Katholischer Theologie*, citing the use of terminology from the *Logic* and the understanding of process as dialectical. The use of *oscillation* (as

⁴⁸ “I consider him a teacher into whose school every theologian must go once. Woe to him who has missed it! So long as he does not remain in or return to it!” Karl Barth: “A Thank you and a Bow. Kierkegaard’s Reveille” in *Canadian Journal of Theology* XI n 1 Jan 1965 3-7 here 6, a translation of Barth’s address at Copenhagen in 1963 at his reception of the Sonning Prize for outstanding development to European Culture by the University and City of Copenhagen. Barth also questioned the idea of giving predominance to Kierkegaard’s “contrasts, contradictions and precipices” (5).

⁴⁹ cf eg Z 154-5

⁵⁰ AE 112 cited by Z 154

⁵¹ *The Pertinence of the Paradox* (Humanities Press, New York 1968) 1

‘driving’ (cause) the different modes of thought) and *Spannung* (as holding together polar opposites) are specifically associated with this same Hegelian background,⁵³ although this is considered to be a *methodological* association, and (even at this methodological level) dialectic is (seen to be) ultimately subordinated to analogy. This recognition of an indisputable link with dialectical thinking but at the service of analogy seems to me to give us an important perspective, suggesting that we are not so much dealing with a balanced *weder* Logos...*weder* dialectic, but a definite opting *for* dialectic, *within* and *ordered to* analogy. Even if dialectic only makes a *take over* bid in the later work (after *Analogia Entis*) it clearly has a position of significance right from the start: there is never an equal weighting of identity and contradiction.

So if there is a tendency for Przywara’s formulation to lead to an exaggeration of dissimilarity it is not so easy to pin down where this tendency begins and ends and it is difficult to envisage how Balthasar could avoid entirely an emphasis so bound to the main thesis. The *necessary* ‘greater dissimilarity’ that rightly belongs to the essentially unequal and asymmetric ‘analogy of being’ between God and creature seems to be replicated in an overemphasis on dissimilarity in all conceptual analysis of reality—as if an inevitable consequence of using analogy as *the* rule of all metaphysics.

That Balthasar’s adoption of Przywara’s analogy does not entirely avoid an overpreponderance of tension and difference in reality itself, is perhaps suggested by his favourable attitude towards Przywara’s understanding that all concepts must be broken into contrasting pairs (by passing through the contradiction of the cross/resurrection dialectic) if they are to provide theological service, implying a significantly negative attitude to our finite concepts *per se*, as though their incompleteness and need of redemption leaves them completely flawed in themselves.⁵⁴ This sense is reinforced by the tendency to associate contradiction with finitude as much as with sin that we

⁵² Marshall Horton: “Contemporary” 73

⁵³ Bouquet: “German” 329

⁵⁴ B 357 Balthasar’s description of the crucified Logos as the one who puts to shame “all the ‘logical’ ways of man” (“Fides Christi” in ET II 74) also brings Przywara to mind.

discussed in chapter six. Moreover it is in the anthropology of *Theo-drama* II—the topic in which Przywara’s contribution survives Balthasar’s critique to be chosen as the main model⁵⁵—that we find exaggerated attention to contradiction in the very synthesis that Balthasar systematically brings to Przywara’s *analogia entis*: that of the person of Christ. In him the natural human tensions (*spannung*) find their answer, not in being *resolved*, but in an *Überspannung* in him, a *hyper or heightened tension* which he shows not to be destructive but livable. It is interesting that earlier, in his book on Karl Barth, the same word *Überspannung* is used to refer to an exaggerated perspective in Barth’s christology.⁵⁶ But here in the tensions of the *Theo-drama* Balthasar makes exaggeration his own.

The persisting preoccupation with dialectic within the preference for analogy gives it a kind of universal significance for all areas of theological description, without proper differentiation. We have already mentioned the ambiguity inherent in a number of the characteristic terms employed by Przywara and absorbed into Balthasar’s expression too. The slippery nature of the meaning conveyed by such terminology is illustrated by Balthasar’s own usage of the term *Widerspruch* when writing of the very “Grundklang” of Przywara’s position. In the same sentence a negative usage of *Widerspruch* describing creaturely opposition to God (“...mit der verzweifelt sich wehrenden, widersprechenden Kreatur, deren Widerspruch und Widerstand...”) ⁵⁷ comes right on the heels of a positive usage describing the authentic difference between God and the world as “*Einheit Gottes mit der Welt im Widerspruch*”. There is no allusion to the different kinds of opposition being placed together in this summary, albeit understood that the latter embraces the former, which is overcome in the cross of God himself, making possible the nuptial union between God and creature. Where traditionally theology has tended to use words like contradiction and opposition of *sin*, here the words embrace a more fundamental, intrinsic characteristic of intra-mundane and God-world relations. In

⁵⁵ cf Th II 355; cf chapter 6 section B above

⁵⁶ KB 242, (KBD 253).

⁵⁷ EP 358

the use of tension and dialectic made by these writers there is a general failure to account clearly for the difference between tensions *inherent* in being/reality and those resulting from *sin*. Not only does tying down Balthasar's treatment of sin in the *Theo-drama* involve isolating it from its sometimes confused relation to the contradictions of natural finitude, we have seen how sin itself, *the* no, *the* contradiction is in fact *intrinsic* to Balthasar's picture of things. It is not to be isolated from the divine plan, indeed it belongs so very much to it that Balthasar can even say that God took account of it in the very act of creation.

Similarly we have also seen how thoroughly being is pervaded by its very opposite, extinction⁵⁸—indeed to the extent that the generation of *life* (and the sexual faculty that makes it possible) is understood through its relation to *death*.⁵⁹ There is a *natural* orientation to termination imaging the 'good' death of the letting be of the Trinity, an imaging which can mean self-surrender to annihilation,⁶⁰ this centrality of death in life and the understanding of its relationship to self-surrender not being unrelated to Heidegger's.⁶¹ Death is life's tragic destiny, Christ's life being supremely a "life for death",⁶² such that the "form of his dying...is the form and rationale of his living",⁶³ a dying undergirding all other deaths, "the abyss of tragedy beyond all tragedy".⁶⁴ Indeed, if we recall the discussion of the development from Przywara's cross-centred analogy to Balthasar's christological *analogia entis*,⁶⁵ in the end it can hardly be said that Balthasar's christocentrism has completely left behind the emphasis on contradiction and difference issuing from Przywara's focus on the cross as the central revelation of analogy in the Son's adoption of radical difference to God. For as we saw in chapter six,

⁵⁸ cf the significance of death in the threefold anthropological polarity in chapter 6 section B; cf also section C3; also Th I 369-408 especially 377f: "life is 'saturated with death' (Tennessee Williams)."

⁵⁹ cf chapter 6 section B2 above

⁶⁰ *Man in History* 220; Th V 101

⁶¹ Th V 323f

⁶² *Man*. 222; R Gawronski observes that it is in his suffering flesh that Christ is most flesh, that his concrete form is heightened to *concretissimum*, for suffering is the heart of the reality of the world. "Jesus Christ Crucified Foundation of the Cosmos" *Communio* 23 summer 1996 345, 349.

⁶³ Th V 324 Regarding the relationship between active and passive death cf Th I 370, 384, 392

⁶⁴ ET 166; Th I 429

⁶⁵ cf chapter 2 above.

in the *Theo-drama* it is the forsakeness of the cross that is the supreme revelation of relationship, for it is *the* revelation of the relationship between Father and Son⁶⁶ (in which all other relationships are contained) and of all nearness to and distance from God. Extreme paradox lies at the heart of it, the abandonment verging on contradiction where “what is ‘experienced’ is the opposite of what the facts indicate” and it is just as possible to say that the forsakeness was the opposite of hell as to say it was hell.⁶⁷

C “Eternal separation in God”⁶⁸ What is Balthasar doing to the Trinity?

These last points remind us that in the end the dialectic of Przywara is not the final influence in Balthasar’s understanding of unity in distinction, but rather a more fundamental difference and separation: that within God himself.⁶⁹ This is developed in Balthasar’s rich, speculative theology of the Trinity, going back as far as *Wahrheit* (1946),⁷⁰ in an understanding that there is paradox in the Trinity, a trinitarian ‘*diastase*’ which is the condition of the possibility of any contradiction at all, such that all intramundane contradiction is grounded trinitarianly.

As our topic is not Balthasar’s doctrine of God we do not intend to set out a detailed critique of his doctrine of the Trinity, but having studied his understanding of the nature-grace relationship we put forward as one of our main concerns regarding his whole understanding of the God-world relationship the extraordinary implications it has for his doctrine of God. Ultimate sense is made of the world, its inherent tensions, its relationship to God (not least the nature-grace relationship) with reference to tensions and separations in the Godhead. Meanwhile, whilst the divine persons are thus stretched apart, the bond between the second person of the Trinity and the created

⁶⁶ Rowan Williams points out that this is close to a Lutheran position. ‘Afterword’ to Gardner, Moss, Quash, Ward: *Balthasar at the end of Modernity* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1999) 178

⁶⁷ Th IV 336

⁶⁸ Ibid. 327

⁶⁹ Although this may have initially been influenced by Przywara’s understanding that God is the ground of polarity and that there is no distance greater than the inner-divine distance. cf Th V 479-481

⁷⁰ cf Th II 258

world is elaborated. It appears that to explain worldly contradiction (including that of sin) Balthasar has introduced it into God (and so no wonder there is confusion between ‘natural’ tension and the tensions belonging to sin). Worldly contradiction is thus made an *imago trinitatis* (whereas in fact one could argue he has thus constructed a doctrine of the Trinity which is made in *imago mundi* with its distances, tensions and contradictions). Similarly the core features of creaturely existence are elucidated by locating them prototypically (in a special divine version) in the eternal Son, but when we talk of the Son’s receptivity and *obedience* can we be sure that Balthasar has not made the Son in the image of a creature rather than the other way round?

Strangely Balthasar does not present his trinitarian innovations as revolutionary. They are unobtrusive, subtle, and are conveyed in a style more akin to mystical contemplation than provocative thesis. They come across as a perspective that *radically deepens* rather than *overturns* traditional understanding. But what Balthasar is doing with the doctrine of the Trinity is undoubtedly revolutionary. For in addition to rejecting separation of the discussion of *De Deo Uno* and *De Deo Trino*, and giving his doctrine of the Trinity a number of distinctive features (including eternal *happening*,⁷¹ ‘eternal time’ and ‘space’,⁷² prayer,⁷³ request,⁷⁴ permission,⁷⁵ consideration,⁷⁶ the virtues⁷⁷) we have found that Balthasar is actually asserting that in the God who “is *one*”⁷⁸ there is *distance*, ‘gaps’. Notwithstanding Balthasar’s qualifications that this is a unique kind of distance,⁷⁹ transcended in the Godhead as the ‘gift’ the three persons

⁷¹This is the interpersonal toing and froing of the triune life identified with eternal being/essence in God. Th V 66f

⁷² (‘letting be’) Ibid. 91-95

⁷³ Ibid. 96

⁷⁴ Ibid. 88

⁷⁵ Ibid. 87

⁷⁶ Ibid. 89

⁷⁷ Ibid. 97

⁷⁸ Dt 6, 4; Mk 12 29, 32; cf also 1 Cor 8, 4; Roms 3, 29-30; Eph 4, 6

⁷⁹It is “incomprehensible and unique”; an infinite otherness of infinite loving relation which grounds and surpasses both all we understand by separation and all we understand by relationship. (Th IV 325) There is the greatest imaginable opposition for the sake the most intimate mutual interpenetration. (II 258) See also chapter 2 note 113 above.

have in common,⁸⁰ and a distance not in opposition to the closeness of the *circumincessio*,⁸¹ it is still *diastase*, “eternally confirmed and maintained”.⁸² Balthasar has specifically chosen to introduce this term which has no history of trinitarian application and to support it with explicit reference to separation,⁸³ a “gulf”⁸⁴ an “absolute, infinite ‘distance’”⁸⁵ in God. Emphasis on the distinctiveness of the divine persons is thus taken to such an extreme that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to square it with their ontological unity, and the paradox of the one in three verges on contradiction.

There is an extraordinary absence of debate on Balthasar’s part over what is manifestly a radical thesis, sitting uncomfortably with (if not contraverting) the Christian tradition of ‘credo in unum Deum’⁸⁶ and indeed directly opposing patristic teaching that there is *no diastase* in God.⁸⁷ This failure on the part of the theologian of patristic retrieval to engage fully with the tradition at this point—even if critically—stands in contrast to the way he treats his innovations with regard to Christ’s adoption of sinful human nature, where he is explicit about the way he builds on and goes beyond the teaching of the Fathers.⁸⁸ And we cannot doubt that Balthasar was completely aware of the full force of the term *diastase*. In an early theological essay he laments and argues for an end to the *diastase* that, negatively, divided theology and spirituality.⁸⁹ What he then considered detrimental to the unity of two spheres of

⁸⁰Th III 333

⁸¹Th V 94 Whilst acknowledging Balthasar’s divergence from the tradition here in as much as Thomas ruled out the use of the terms separation and division, Dalzell finds Balthasar’s rejection of tritheism and his assertion of the oneness of the divine freedom adequate defence against the accusation that he compromises the unity of the Godhead. *Dramatic* 164f, 186f, 193.

⁸²Th IV 333

⁸³Ibid. 327

⁸⁴Ibid. 326

⁸⁵Ibid. 323

⁸⁶The Nicene-Constantinople Symbol of Faith (cf also Toledo Symbol 675; Lateran Symbol 1215; Profession of Faith of Pius IV 1564; Profession of Faith of Paul VI 1968); *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 199-202, 222, 228.

⁸⁷See chapter 2 section C above

⁸⁸See chapter 6 section D2 above

⁸⁹“Theologie und Spiritualität” in *Gregorianum* 50 1969 571-586 collected in *Einfaltungen Auf Wegen christlicher Einigung* (Kösel-Verlag München 1969) (English translation: *Convergences to the Sources of Christian Mystery* (Ignatius, San Francisco 1984) translated by E A Nelson)

human activity is now considered unproblematic to the unique unity of the One God. Whilst account must be taken of Balthasar's programme of combining metaphysics and metaphor in God-talk, the employment of *diastasis* by no means slips tidily into the category of image (as might be said of the use of 'prayer' or 'surprise'), being delineated in terms of *analogy*, as we have seen.

There is a similar failure to acknowledge fully the controversial nature of the subsequent teaching, resting on *diastase*, that this 'holy separation' and 'opposition' of the divine persons grounds *sinful* opposition, such that the God of *love* is likewise the ground of *sin*, *suffering*, *the cross* and *hell*, all of which are therefore given a place *intrinsic* to the divine plan, taken account of in creation, and indeed before. Not only does this stretch paradox (and God) to the point of incoherence, it has enormous implications for the kind of God we are talking about—a loving God who includes suffering in his eternal plan? It raises questions about his immutability and impassibility,⁹⁰ and about the ultimate origin of evil. Do Balthasar's efforts to engage with modern understandings of freedom, evil and God, in which "it is God who bears the contradiction (including hell) in himself",⁹¹ end up resembling them rather too closely? Balthasar is happier to discuss other, related, controversial features of his doctrine of the Trinity, such as limitation, event/'happening' and 'development' in God.⁹²

Finally, if we are concerned about how the doctrine of God comes out of Balthasar's theology of the God-world relationship, then it is our understanding of the person of the Son that is most in jeopardy. We saw in Part I how it was a strictly christological doctrine of creation that made possible a new christocentric perspective on the

⁹⁰ See Th II 280; IV 327-8 Here it does seem that in order to guarantee drama in God, there needs to be a potential in him to suffer ("there is something in God that can develop into suffering"), which is only fulfilled in the context of the creation of the world. cf Th V 13, 506-520 esp. 512ff A detailed study can be found in G O'Hanlon: *The Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990).

⁹¹ Th I 48-9; cf 66 (Hegel's idea of the tragedy played in the absolute); 520 (Jung's "projection onto God of a polarity structure that is typical of the creature".); Dalzell: "The Enrichment of God" 4 (Moltmann's "Hegelian assimilation of the process of the world to the inner history of God").

⁹² See eg Th V66ff, 71

relationship between nature and grace. However the nature of the increasingly intense and consistent association of the Son with creation found in the *Theo-drama*—as divinity in *tropos* of receptivity and obedience,⁹³ as the world's idea in whose eternal receipt of Godhead (begetting) creation's receipt of existence and its divinization is contained⁹⁴—when combined with his emphatic separation from the Father can leave us feeling less than sure which is the greater: the distance between creation and the divine Son (who is God) or the distance between the Son and the Father.⁹⁵ The Father-Son distinction and the Infinite freedom/finite freedom distinction are not sufficiently distinguished. In the many associations of the Son and creation this latter fundamental distinction between the Father-Son distinction and the creature-God distinction is rarely mentioned and does not form part of the unfolding description and emphasis. It is not the case that Balthasar is 'promoting' creation to the same status as the Logos. He is explicit in asserting the non-divinity of creation⁹⁶ (although there are places where his trinitarian location of creation leaves his expression more ambiguous than it could be⁹⁷), and the share that finite beings have of the divine Sonship is clearly adoptive and never

⁹³Th II 267; 261 (chapter 4 section B1 above) This is emphatic: "the Son...cannot *be* and *possess* the absolute nature of God except in the mode of receptivity." (IV 325-326); cf also "Nine propositions on Christian Ethics" in *Principles of Christian Morality* (San Francisco, 1976) 82; Th II 267; III 520ff; IV 330; V 248 (chapter 5 section D2 above).

⁹⁴See chapter 2 section C; chapter 5 section C and F above. Balthasar uses the same language of 'given not just lent' of the gifts of freedom and grace (Th II 428; 290; V 109; *Engagement* 25) and the Son's 'gift' of divinity (Th IV 325). Also compare the Son's receipt of the Spirit in his relation to the Father (V 104) and a human being's receipt of the Spirit in *his* birth from God (III 36 note 1).

⁹⁵Indeed whilst God is 'non-other' vis-à-vis us, there is infinite otherness between Father and Son. (See chapter 2 section C above)

⁹⁶This emphasis is evident throughout his work because of the centrality of the analogy of being. We therefore just give a couple of examples: "we are creatures and not the eternal Logos." Th III 229 note 68 "Between the divine and created natures there is an essential abyss. It cannot be circumvented." III 220

⁹⁷When talking about the creature receiving itself he says "here the gift of God separates itself from God as the fruit separates itself from the tree" (Th II 288), as though the human creature-God relationship was the same kind of organic emanation as there is between a plant and its produce. But "the idea that the world and man have developed out of God "is precisely the "perversion" of Christianity that he wants to reject (II 420), although he is not unaware of how easily Christian formulation can be thus distorted ("Given the Christian assertion that man in Christ "is born of God", why should he not be ultimately of divine nature himself?"). Whether he is aware that his own expression might lend itself to this kind of interpretation is another matter. Tellingly his reflection on how the nothingness out of which the world is made is located in infinite freedom itself winds up with the position of Scotus Erigena whose identification of this 'nothingness' and God himself yielded pantheistic conclusions (which of course Balthasar does not adopt, but neither is he here explicit in his rejection of them.) (II 265-266)

causes the analogy of being to break down.⁹⁸ However it is less easy to defend him against some kind of subordinationism, perhaps of an Arian hue,⁹⁹ however inadvertent. We have already seen how his outworking of the idea that the nature-grace relationship specifically images the relationship of the divine persons suggests an inequality between the Father and the Son.¹⁰⁰ If it is the case, as we tentatively suggest, that as a result of trying to provide a detailed account of worldly characteristics and processes as an image of the Trinity these same features are projected onto God (in a mysterious, paradoxical form—where for example distance can mean a superlative form of closeness), then it is the Son, as *the* image after whom creation is made, who is the greatest casualty. He above all is the receptacle of all the creaturely characteristics—receptivity, responsiveness, obedience, gender differentiation and so on—so that distinguishing his attitude towards the Father from the creaturely attitude becomes extremely difficult. As Balthasar himself puts it in the context of the finite-infinite freedom relationship:

The crux is that it is extremely hard to see how the Son, who “receives” Godhead, and hence eternal freedom, from the Father (and so seems to be closely related to the creature), can nonetheless possess this infinite freedom in the same sovereign manner (albeit in the mode of obedience) as the Father.

Is

‘having-life-in himself’ sufficient to distinguish the Son from the creature if, on the other hand, like the creature, he does not seem to possess this interior freedom ‘of himself’?¹⁰¹

Balthasar goes on to uphold the Son-creature distinction in this context on the basis that the Son’s self-reception from the Father is the receipt of “the originless, self-possessing God, that is, the fullness of being”.¹⁰² Such possession of the ‘form of God’ (“in very truth”) is the necessary presupposition of his incarnational kenosis (otherwise his adoption of the form of a servant would not be a self-emptying but like the creature’s

⁹⁸eg Th II 241-242

⁹⁹He specifically denies an Arian interpretation of ‘happening’ in the Trinity, ie happening understood as a coming to be of something that once was not (Th V 67, 497; II 261). However our concern is an unintentional conflation of the Father-son and God-world distinction. Interestingly it is to Eckhart, whose exact influence on Balthasar is often so hard to pin down, that he attributes (and rejects) a teaching in which the Son and the world have moved too close together. (V 442)

¹⁰⁰See chapter 4 section E above

¹⁰¹Th II 267

¹⁰²Ibid. 267-268

who simply “comes into being *in* this state”).¹⁰³ However this distinction is complicated by the fact that the Son’s self-emptying and adoption of the sinful human state has a primal place in the inner life of the Trinity and belongs to his person (which is identical with his mission) from eternity.¹⁰⁴ Moreover such a clarification of the creature-son distinction does not of course account for the radical *distance* between the Father and the Son; but nor, however, does it ameliorate the emphasis on the Son’s indebtedness and obedience as his *very tropos*, his *identity*. Is such a relationship to the Father *compatible* with possession of the very form of God and his infinite freedom? (or to put it in the terms of the passage quoted above: *can there be an ‘obedient-sovereign’ possession of infinite freedom?*) Finally, when we recall that elsewhere Balthasar uses the same scriptural phrase he here applies to the Son—“to have life in himself”—to describe creaturely receipt of grace¹⁰⁵ the distinction between the Son’s receipt of the fullness of divine being and the creature’s receipt of divine being (in the grace of participation) does not seem quite so clear.

We have suggested the possibility that at least part of the motivation for the Father-Son *diastase* is to explain the *diastase* between the world and God.¹⁰⁶ In the end, are the two *diastases* really different?¹⁰⁷ Or is this strange distinction in God which is never fully explained really just the God-world distinction, so important to Balthasar, introduced into God, in an effort to establish its ground? After all, if John Damascene is right and there is no God-God *diastase*, then this is the only *diastase* available. Some kind of conflation of the two *diastases*—God-world, Father-Son—would certainly be consistent with our concerns that descriptions of the second person of the Trinity seem to bring him onto our side of the God-creature divide. Of course one of the main

¹⁰³Ibid. 268

¹⁰⁴See chapter 6 section D2 above

¹⁰⁵Th III 35-36; (see chapter 5 section B2 above)

¹⁰⁶ “Without this personal distance in the *circumincessio* of the Persons it would be impossible to understand either the creature’s distance from God or the Son’s economic distance from the Father”. (Th V 98 cf also 94; II 261) Similarly the fact that there are in the Trinity in a ‘supra-essential’ way such things as process, distance, surprise—all those things known in the creaturely sphere permeated with potentiality, facilitates understanding how creatures can be embedded in God so as to attain perfection without losing their creaturely nature. cf V 394

difficulties with identifying such a confusion between the God-God and the God-world distinction in Balthasar is that it would fly in the face of the law of the analogy of being so important to him, and Balthasar is well aware that the “temptation to equate the distance between God and the creature with the ‘distance’ found within the Trinity” is soundly quashed by the Fourth Lateran Council’s definition.¹⁰⁸ But what of the temptation to equate the God-God distinction with the God-world distance? That is more the problem for Balthasar. Fully answering these questions belongs to another study, but they emerge as critical implications of Balthasar’s treatment of our topic.

¹⁰⁷Balthasar of course denies they are the same (Th II 266). But *can* we clearly distinguish the two?

¹⁰⁸Th IV 380

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